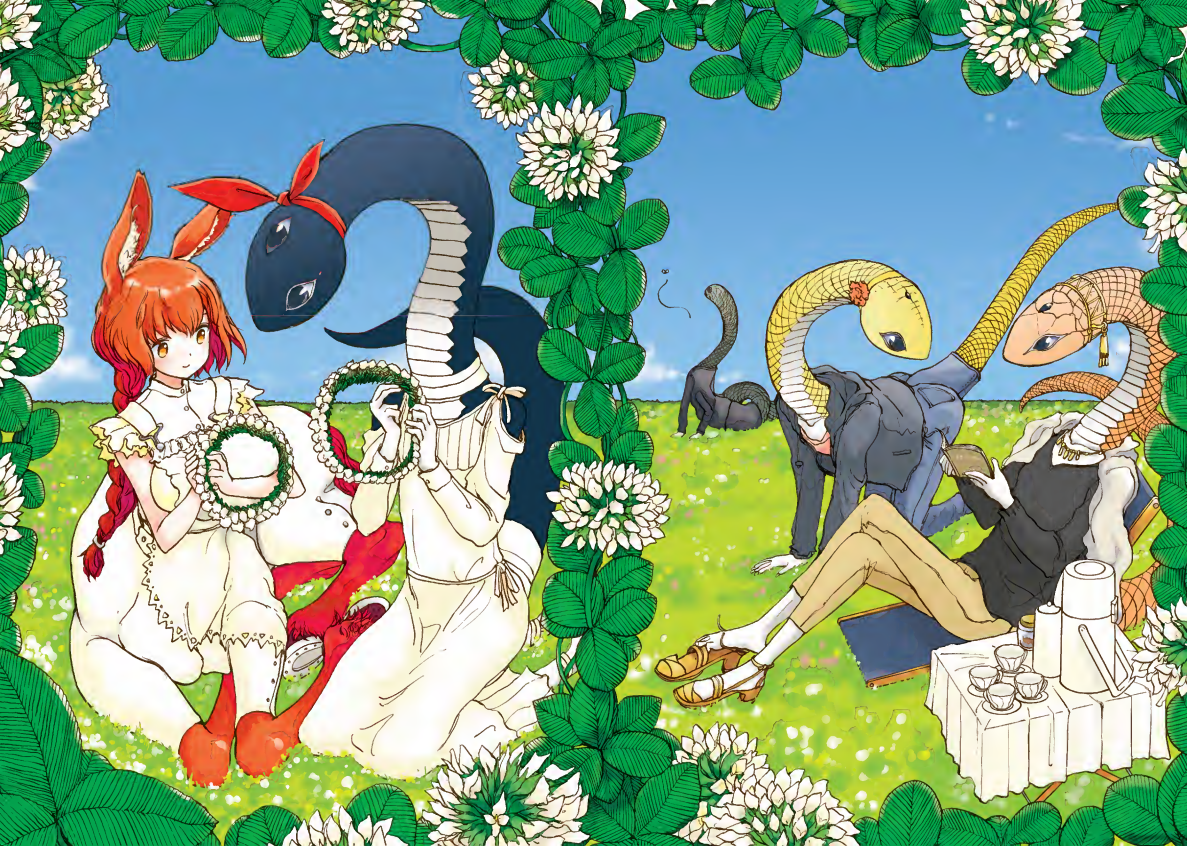
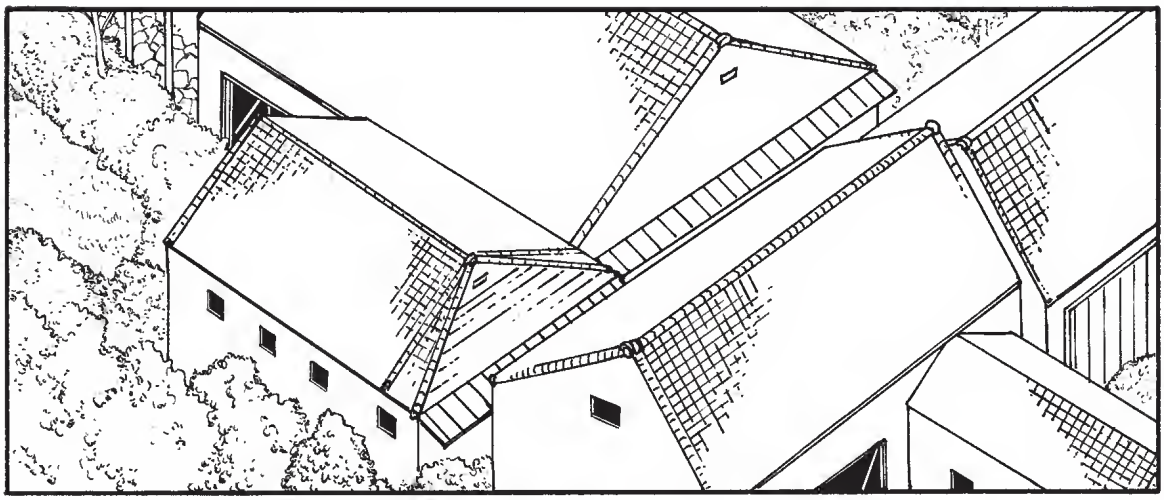
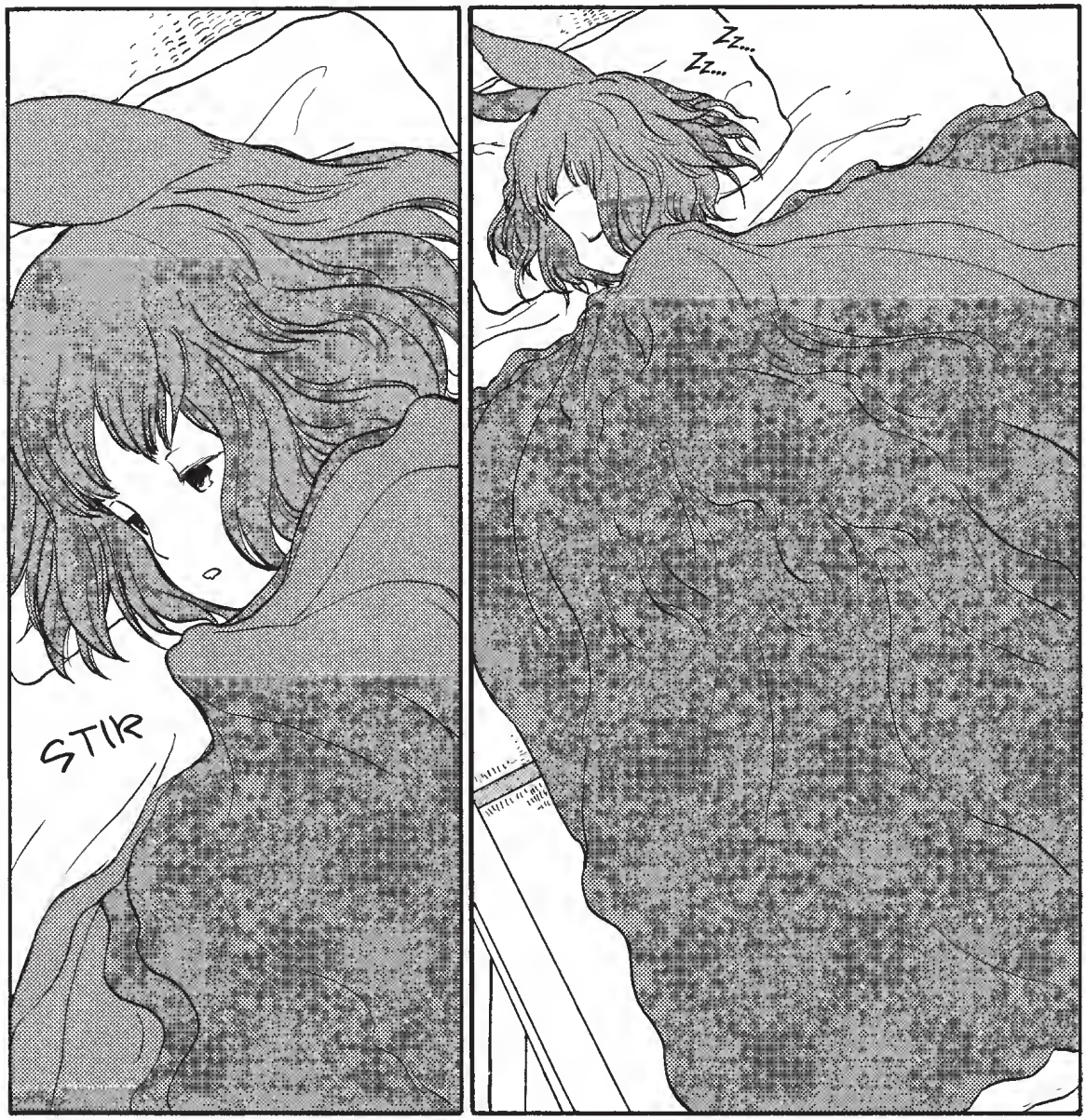
A CentaUr's Life
10
story & art
KEI MURAYAMA

PRESENTED BY
KEI
MURAYAMA
10
A CentaUr's Life



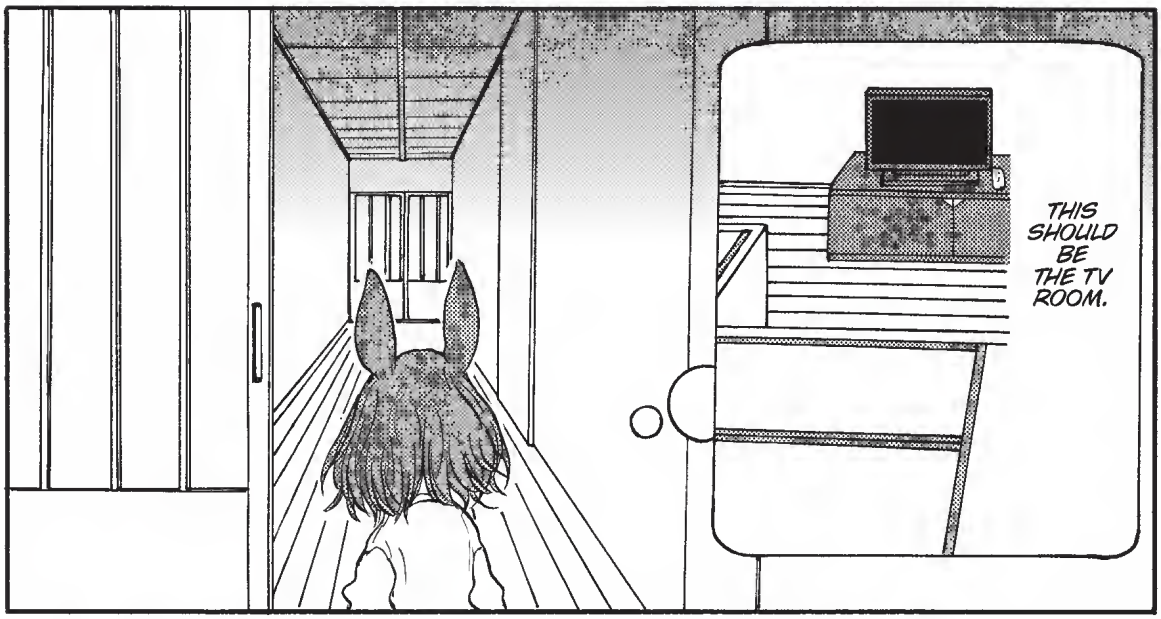


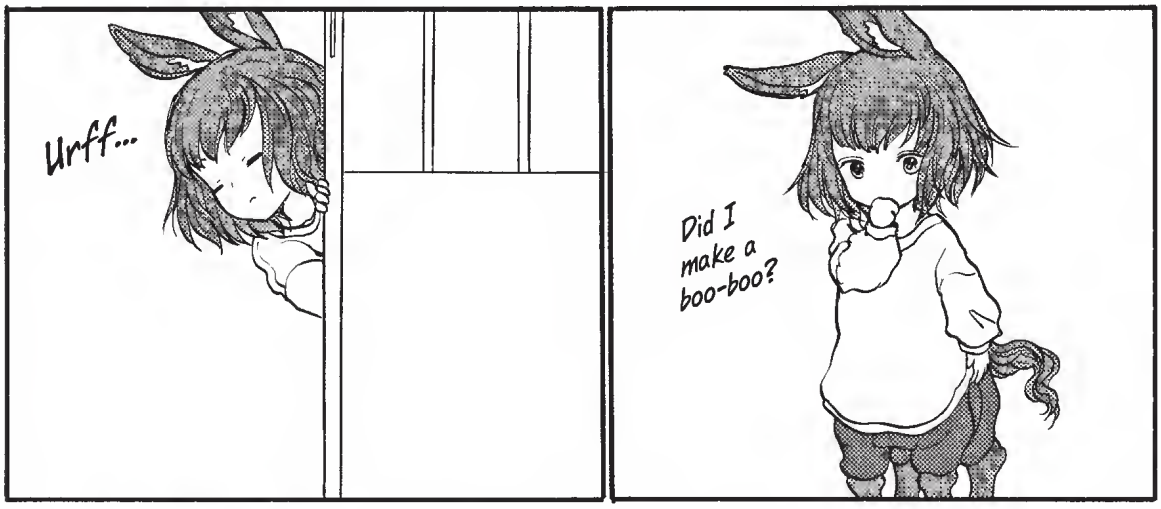

STIR
Zz...
Zz...

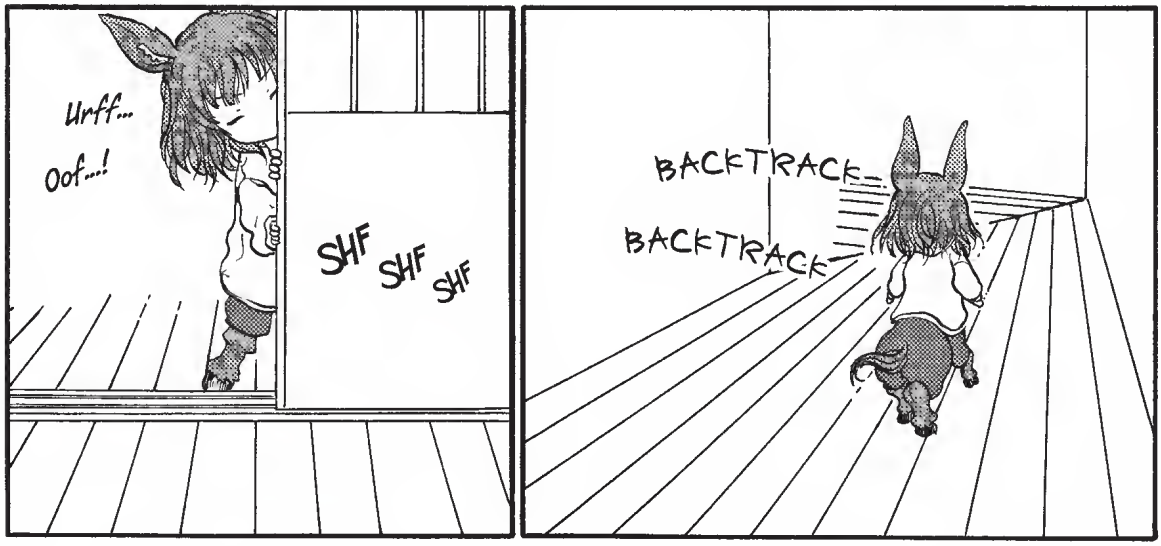
CHAPTER 61

Where's sissie Miko?
MATH II
Math Made Simple Enough for Dogs
SCAMPER SCAMPER
RUB RUB
Nghh...
SILENCE
Miii...
SISSIE MIIIKOOO!
MATH II
MOOOM!
SISSIE MIIIK-OOO!
HOP

MAYBE THEY'RE IN THE TV ROOM?
CLOPPITY CLOP
CLOPPITY CLOP
SLIDE SLIDE
Urff...
What the...?
Urff...

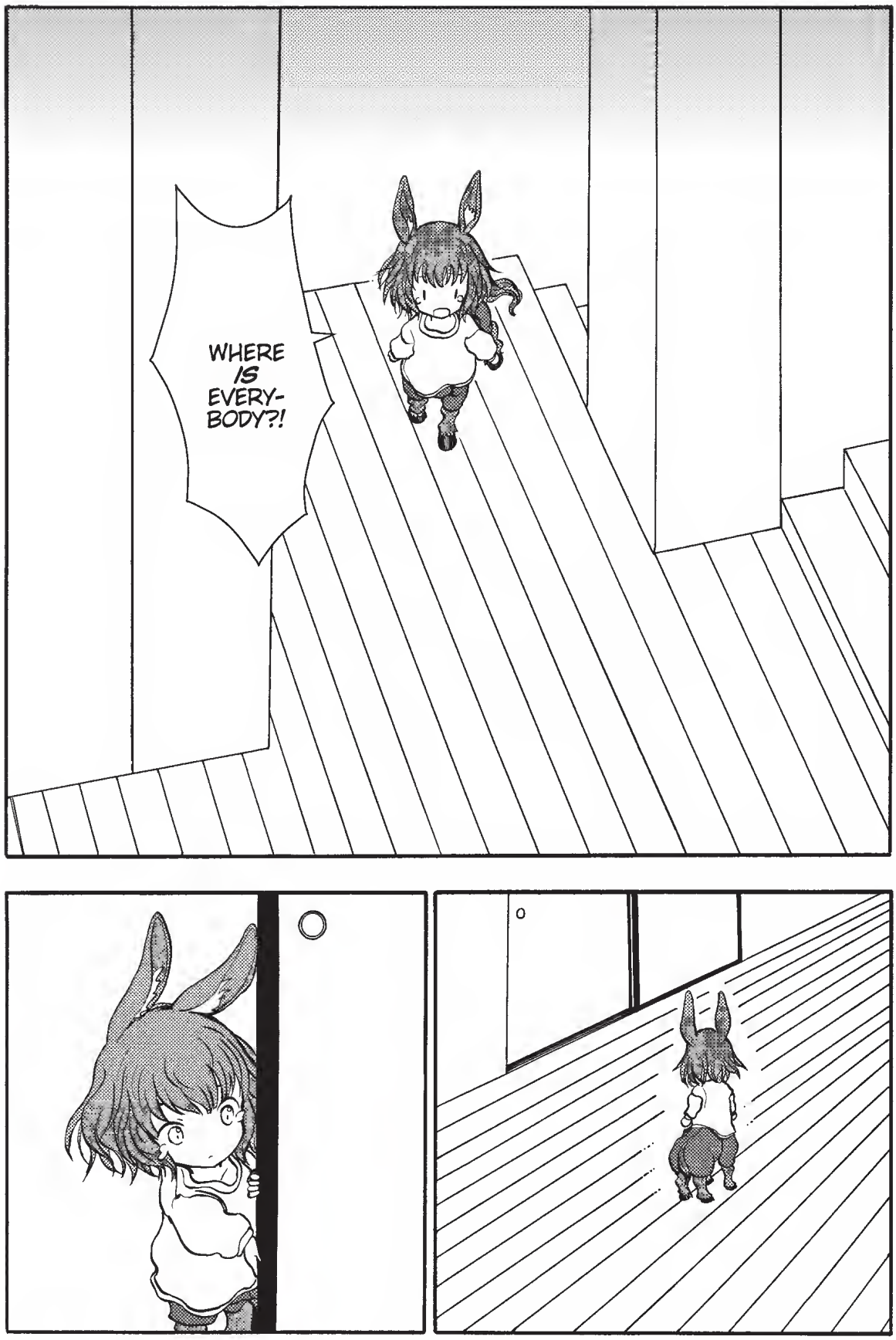

THIS SHOULD BE THE TV ROOM.

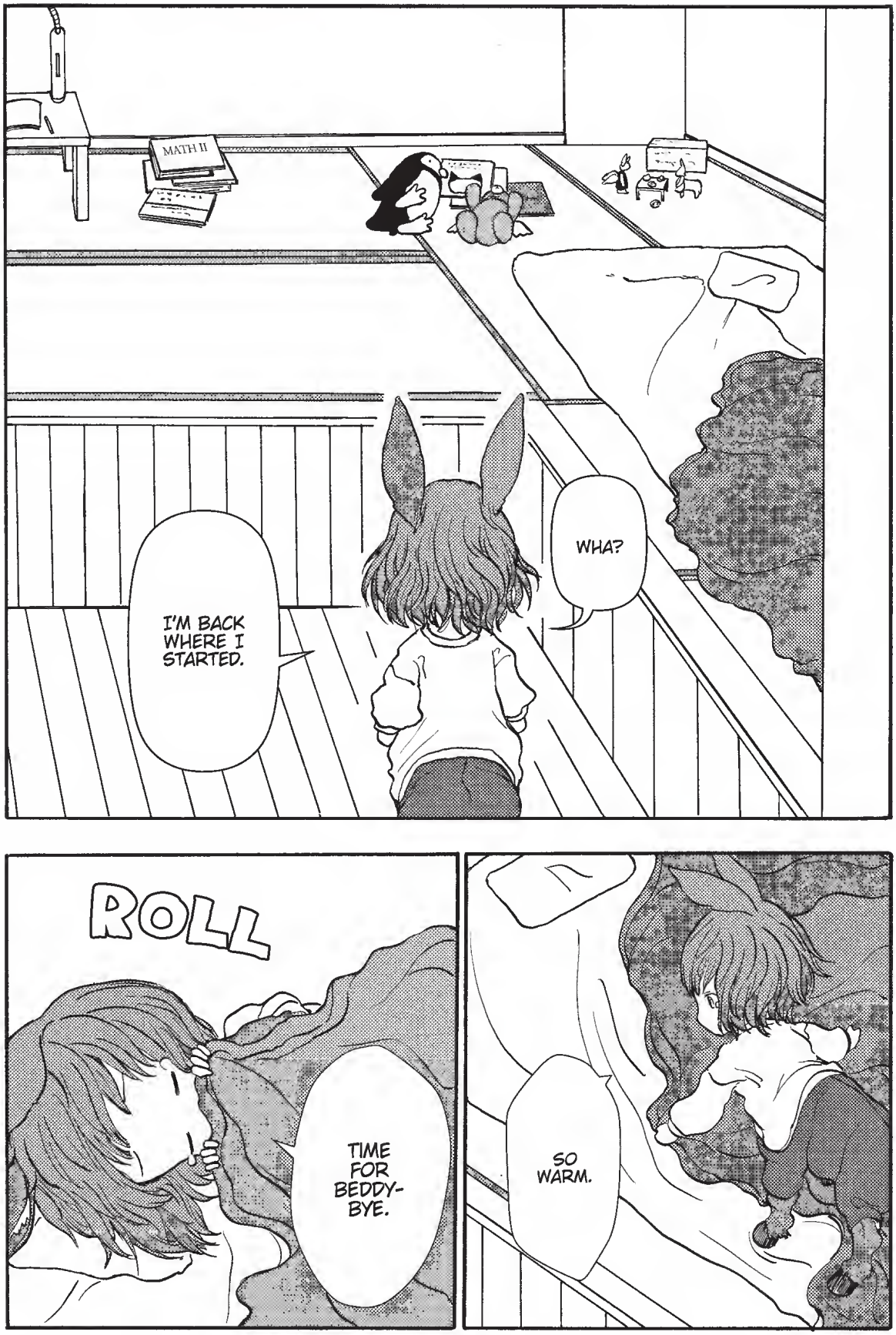

Urff...
Did I make a boo-boo?

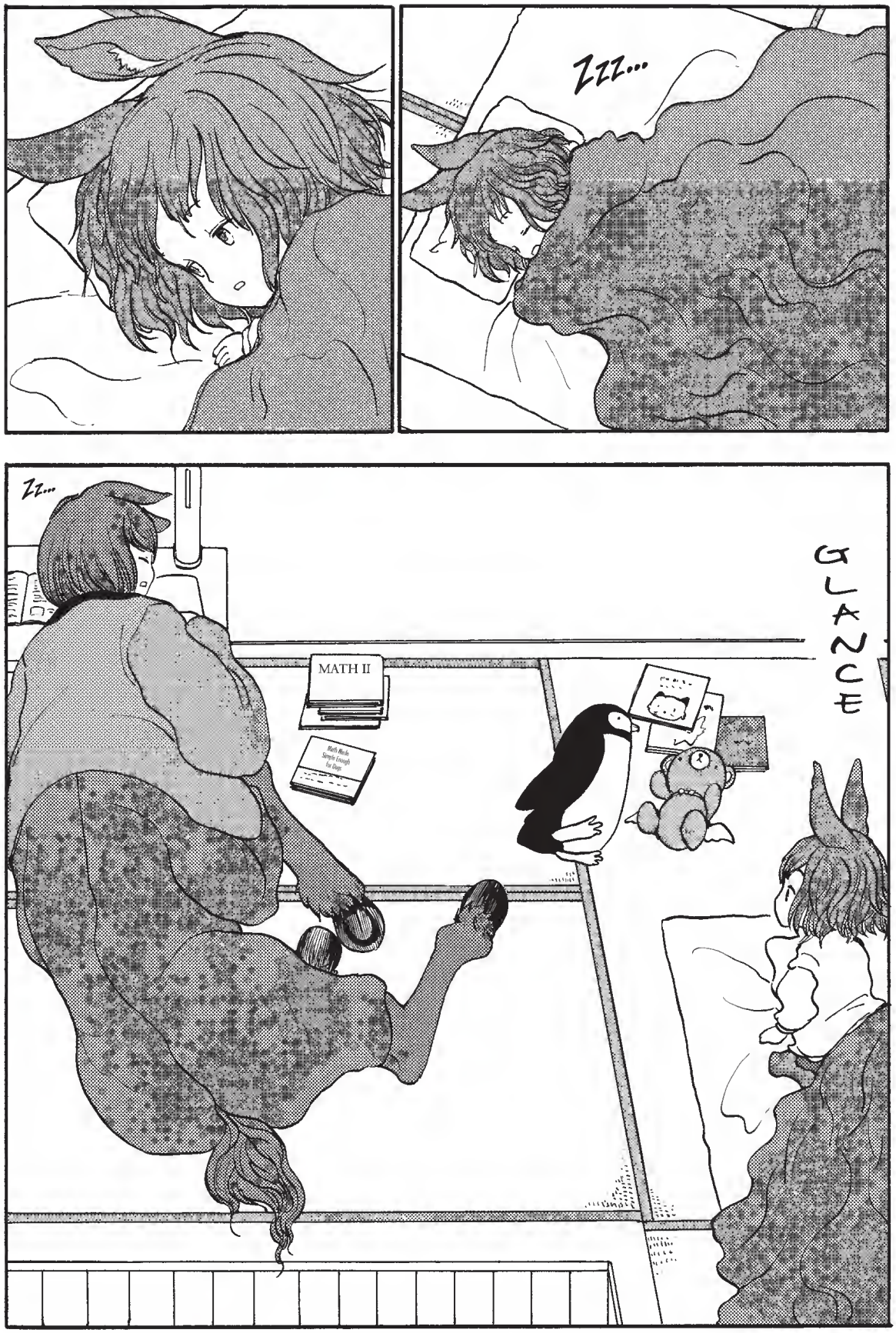

Urff...
Oof...!
SHF SHF SHF
BACKTRACK-
BACKTRACK-

Myah?
Mumble
Mumble
CLOPPITY
CLOP
FWIP
WHO'S
THAT?

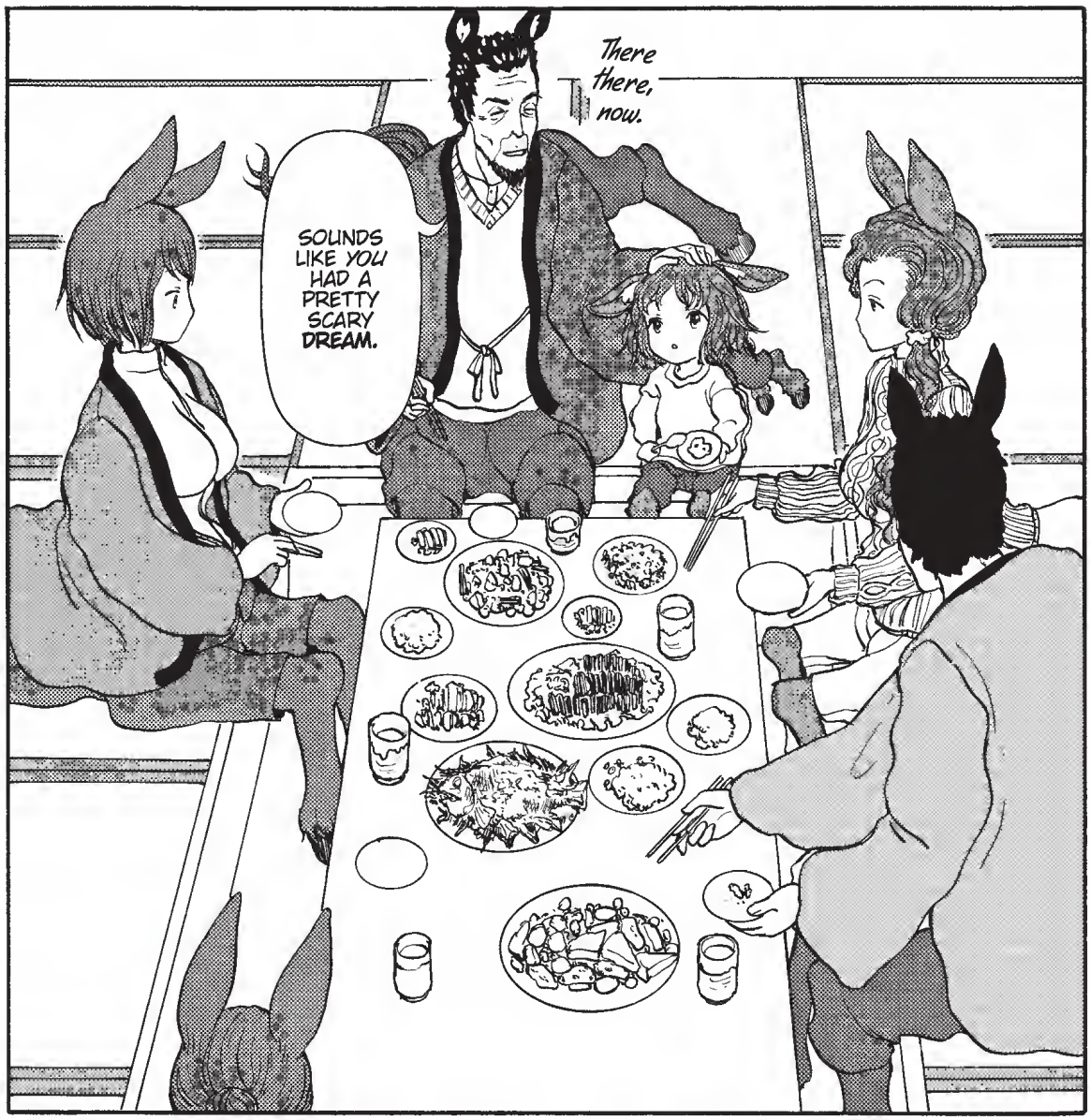
Mumble
Mumble
K-
TUNK
トコンッ
SISSIE
MIII-
KOOO!
MOOOM!
DAAAD!
GRAMMAAA!
GRAMPAAA!
WHERE
AAARE
YOUUU?!


WHERE IS EVERY-BODY?!


MATH II
WHA?
I'M BACK WHERE I STARTED.
ROLL
TIME FOR BEDDY-BYE.
SO WARM.


Zzz...
Zz...
MATH II
GLANCE

GLANCE
NGAH?
SISSIE MIKO, THERE YOU ARE!
You alive?
Nnh...
WAIT, WAS I ASLEEP?
HIME-CHAN, YOU'RE AWAKE.
THAT MEANS...
Oh nooo!
...I HAVEN'T EVEN STARTED MY HOME-WORK!

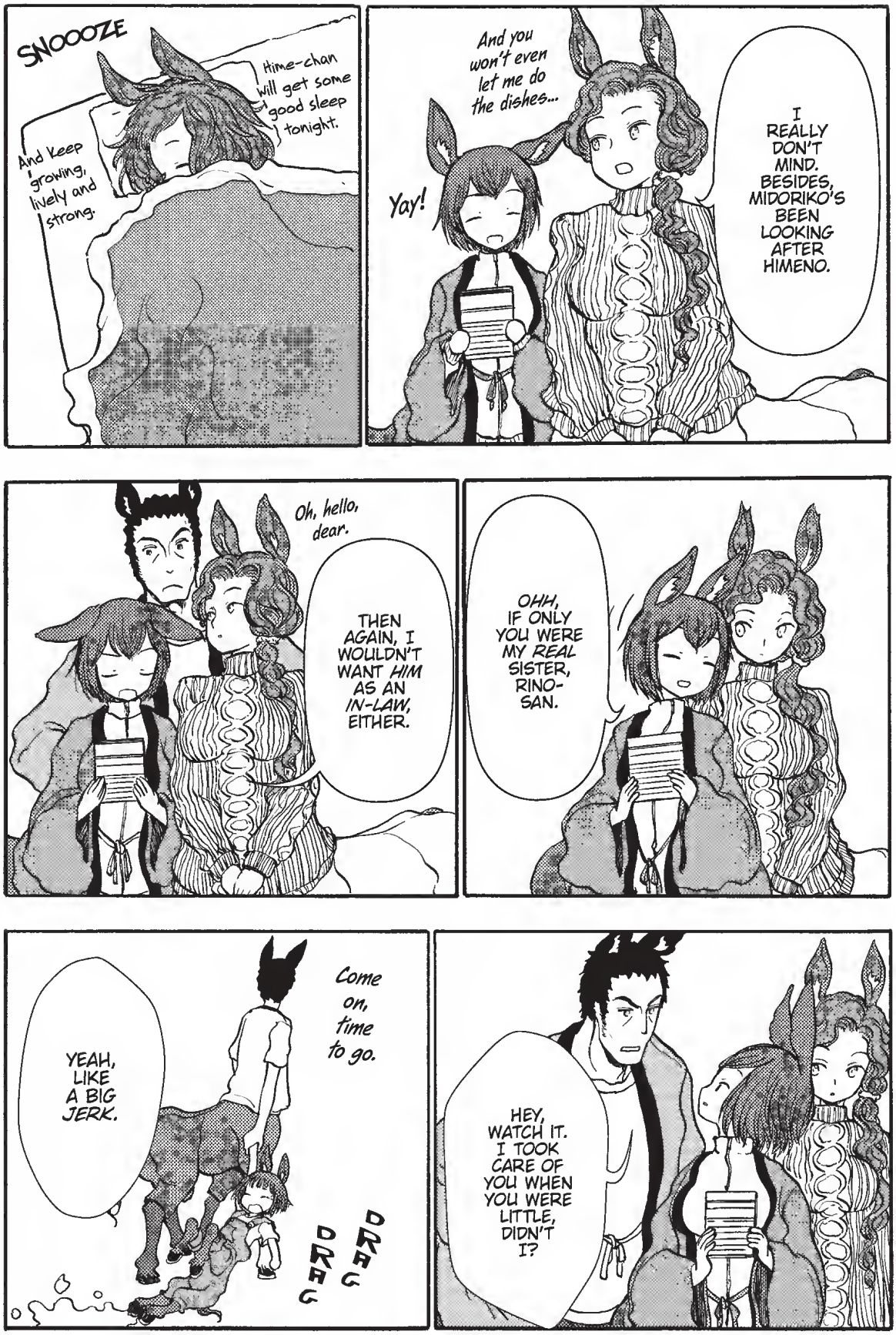

There there, now.
SOUNDS LIKE YOU HAD A PRETTY SCARY DREAM.

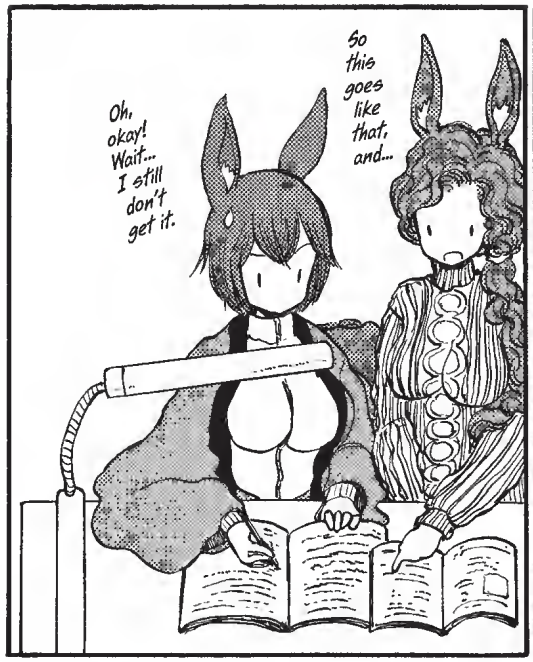
I see... Just a dream...

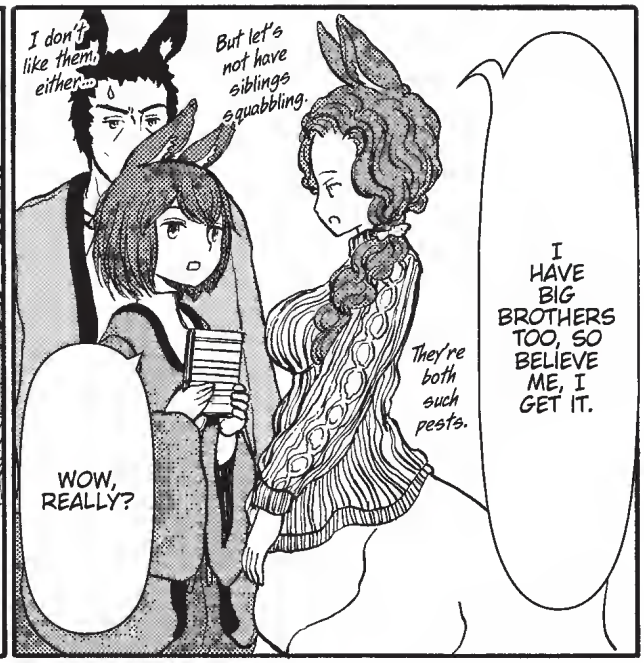
A DREAM?

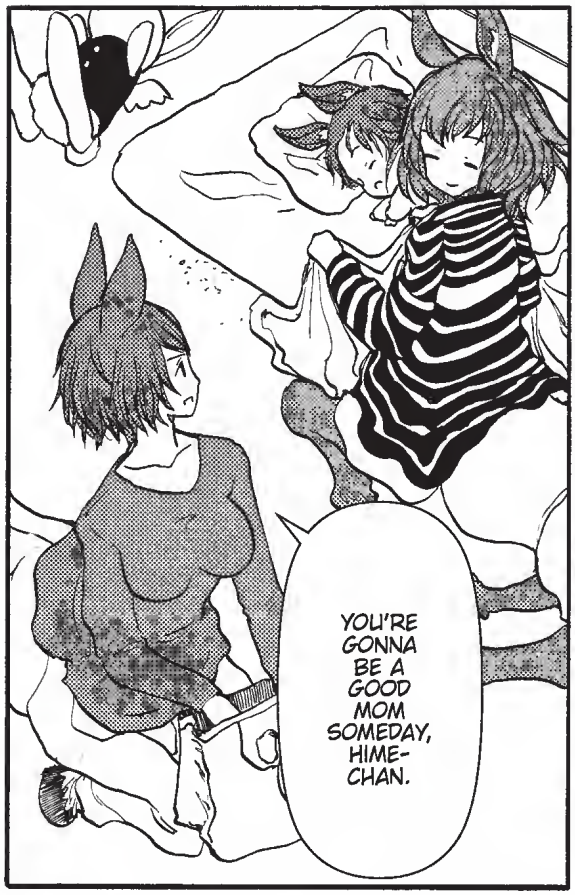
YOU SHOULD TEAR DOWN THIS CRUSTY OLD PLACE AND BUILD A NEW HOUSE.
With your other son's money, of course.
NON-SENSE. THIS HOME HAS HISTORY.
They're not in use anymore, of course.
WELL, THIS IS A BIG, OLD HOUSE WITH HIDDEN PASSAGES BUILT FOR SERVANTS.
That's odd. Was this house always this big?
EVEN FOR A GROWN-UP, IT WAS PRETTY SCARY.
ACTUALLY, THE SAME THING HAPPENED TO ME.
Good din-din, gramma.
...OR GIFTED.
I CAN'T TELL WHETHER THIS CHILD IS DULL...
AND SHE JUST WENT BACK TO BED?

HEY, BIG SISTER-IN-LAW?
Now young lady, you just leave this stuff to Kiku.
I WAS HOPING YOU'D HELP ME WITH MY HOMEWORK AGAIN TODAY.
MIDORIKO, JUST BECAUSE RINO-SAN IS FAMILY DOESN'T MEAN SHE'S NOT A GUEST!
IF YOU MUST ASK SOMEONE, HAVE SOUTA LOOK AT IT.
BUT RINO-SAN IS SUCH A GOOD TEACHER!
SOUTA'S THE *WORST*. ALWAYS GOING OFF ON POINTLESS TANGENTS.
Blah blah blah.
HE THINKS HE'S *SOOO* SMART...


SNOOOZE
Hime-chan will get some good sleep tonight.
And keep growing, lively and strong.
And you won't even let me do the dishes...
Yay!
I REALLY DON'T MIND. BESIDES, MIDORIKO'S BEEN LOOKING AFTER HIMENO.
Oh, hello, dear.
THEN AGAIN, I WOULDN'T WANT HIM AS AN IN-LAW, EITHER.
OHH, IF ONLY YOU WERE MY REAL SISTER, RINO-SAN.
Come on, time to go.
YEAH, LIKE A BIG JERK.
DRAG
DRAG
HEY, WATCH IT. I TOOK CARE OF YOU WHEN YOU WERE LITTLE, DIDN'T I?


So this goes like that, and...
Oh, okay! Wait... I still don't get it.


I don't like them, either...
But let's not have siblings squabbling.
They're both such pests.
I HAVE BIG BROTHERS TOO, SO BELIEVE ME, I GET IT.
WOW, REALLY?


YOU'RE GONNA BE A GOOD MOM SOMEDAY, HIME-CHAN.

AWW, SHINO-CHAN, ARE YOU READY FOR NI-NI?

Hmm...
DO YOU NEED HELP WITH ANY SCHOOL-WORK?
BY THE WAY...
I CAN TOTALLY HELP WITH ELE-MENTARY SCHOOL STUFF!
THERE'S GOT TO BE SOME-THING.
WHA-AAT?!
NOPE, I'M GOOD!
SCIENCE
Grade 6
THERE'S THIS.
WELL, IN THAT CASE...

G... gauge?
Are we talking about model trains?
Up Quark
Down Quark
Gluon (a type of gauge boson)
Up Quark
Like this.
I'M HAVING TROUBLE VISUALIZING A MODEL IN WHICH QUARKS "PLAY CATCH" WITH GAUGE BOSONS TO TRANSMIT A FORCE...
I HAVE NOTHING LEFT TO TEACH YOU.
SCIENCE
BUT YOU'RE SO GOOD WITH A BOW, BIG SIS MIDORIKO!
I GUESS I COULD STILL TEACH YOU THAT STUFF...
The hands-on way, of course.

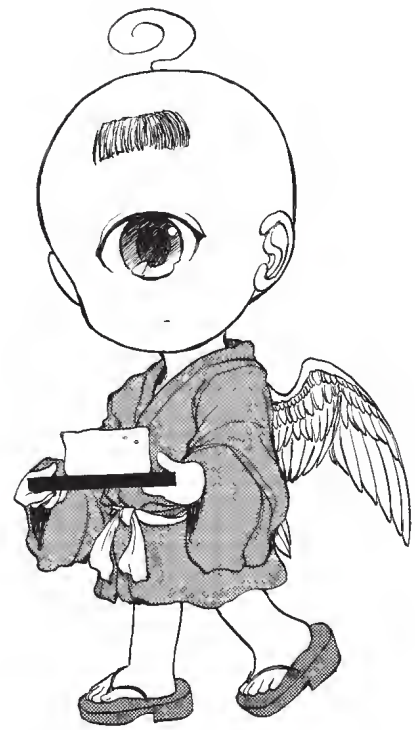
A CentaUr's Life

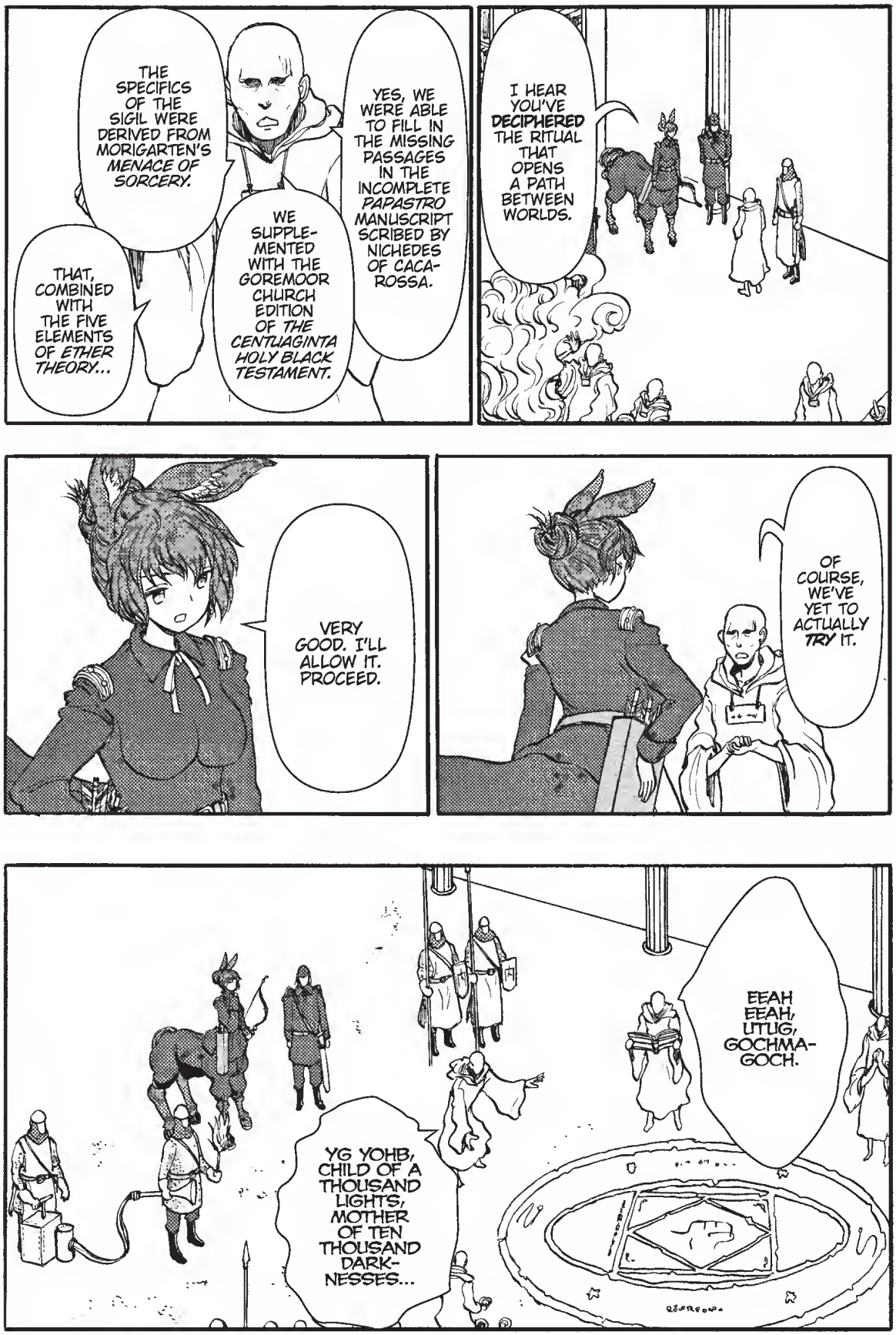
JAPANESE *YOKAI*

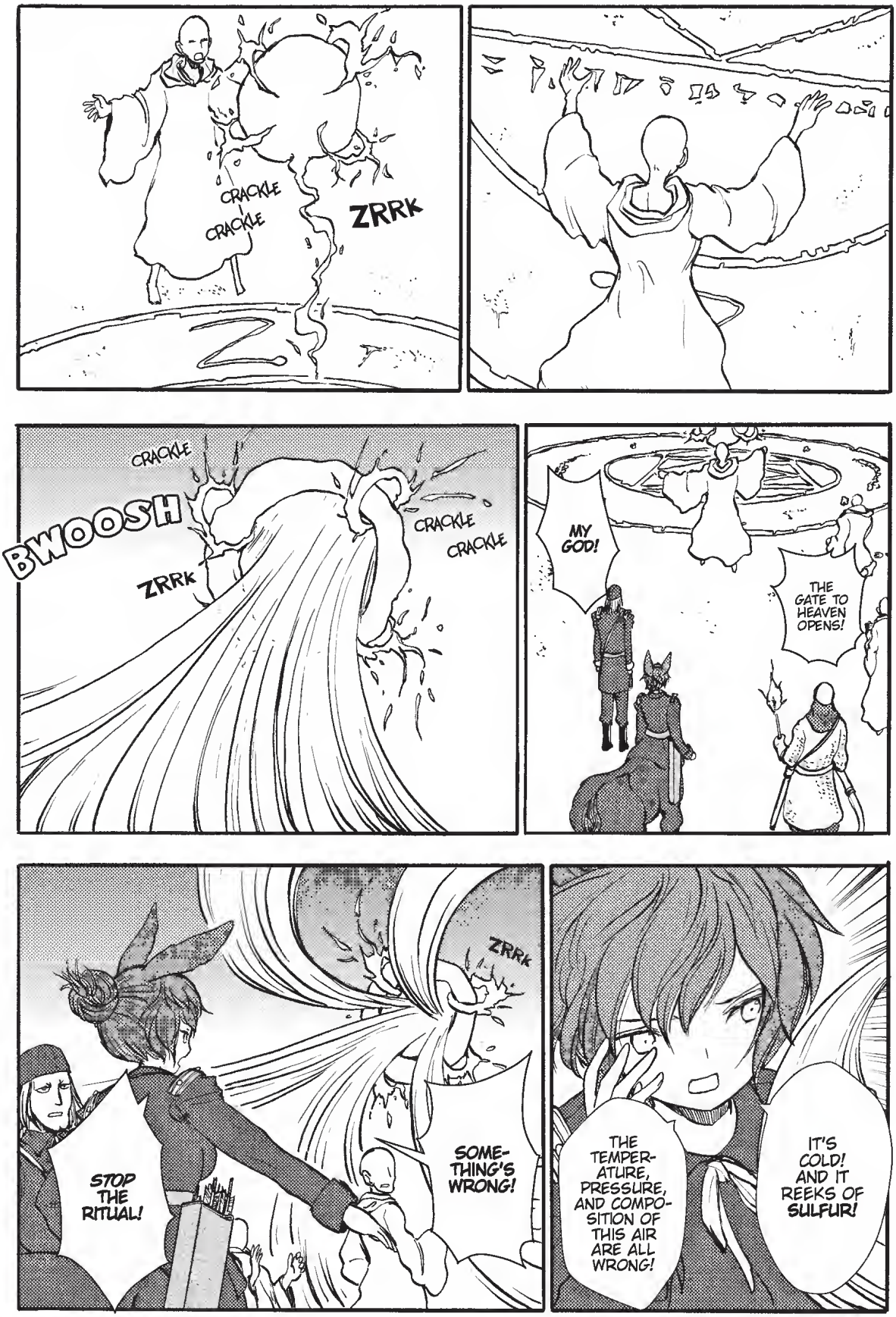
HITOTSU-ME KOZO (ONE-EYED BOY)

THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF THE TERM "*YOKAI*" ENCOMPASSES A WIDE VARIETY OF MYSTERIOUS, PARANORMAL, OR SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENA. IT IS PART OF HUMAN NATURE TO ATTEMPT TO DEFINE AND EXPLAIN THE WORLD AROUND US, BUT SOME THINGS SEEM TO DEFY EXPLANATION. PEOPLE BEGAN TO APPLY NAMES TO THESE BIZARRE PHENOMENA AND USE ART AS A WAY TO VISUALIZE AND PERSONIFY SOMETHING INHERENTLY FORMLESS AND INTANGIBLE. THESE WORKS WERE KNOWN AS *YOKAI-GA*, AND THE *YOKAI* WE KNOW TODAY CAME TO BE AS RESULT OF THEIR DEVIATION OVER TIME FROM REPRESENTATIONS OF STRANGE OCCURRENCES TO RECOGNIZABLE STANDALONE ENTITIES.

THE ORIGIN OF *HITOTSU-ME KOZO* IS SAID TO BE AN ODDITY WITNESSED AT A SAMURAI'S RESIDENCE, THOUGH HE HAS SINCE DRIFTED FROM HIS ORIGINAL CONTEXT AND APPEARED IN COUNTLESS OTHER TALES. SOME SCHOLARS CLAIM THAT THIS *YOKAI* WAS A CORRUPTED DEITY, WHILE OTHERS POSTULATE THAT IT MAY HAVE BEEN A PERSON BORN WITH THE RARE CYCLOPIA DEFECT. EITHER WAY, IT IS COMMON FOR *YOKAI* TO RESEMBLE A TYPICAL HUMAN PLUS OR MINUS ONE THING. *YOKAI* OFTEN EMBODY ONE HUMAN ATTRIBUTE EXAGGERATED TO AN INHUMAN DEGREE, AND HENCE TEND TO FUNCTION AS PHYSICAL SYMBOLS FOR CONCEPTS.

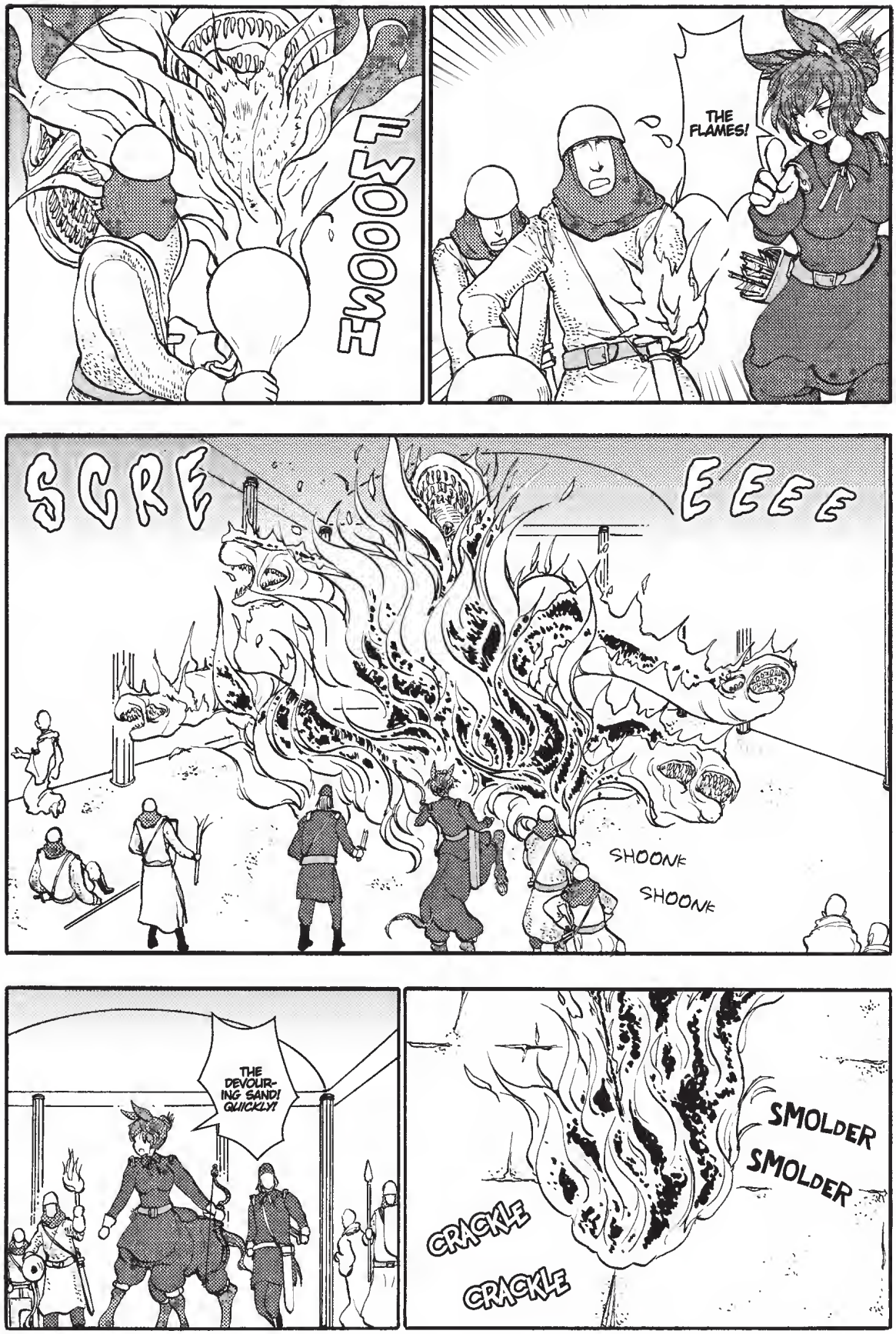



THE SPECIFICS OF THE SIGIL WERE DERIVED FROM MORIGARTEN'S *MENACE OF SORCERY.*
YES, WE WERE ABLE TO FILL IN THE MISSING PASSAGES IN THE INCOMPLETE *PAPASTRO* MANUSCRIPT SCRIBED BY NICHEDES OF CACAROSSA.
WE SUPPLEMENTED WITH THE GOREMOOR CHURCH EDITION OF *THE CENTUAGINTA HOLY BLACK TESTAMENT.*
THAT, COMBINED WITH THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF *ETHER THEORY...*
I HEAR YOU'VE **DECIPHERED** THE RITUAL THAT OPENS A PATH BETWEEN WORLDS.
VERY GOOD. I'LL ALLOW IT. PROCEED.
OF COURSE, WE'VE YET TO ACTUALLY ***TRY*** IT.
YG YOHB, CHILD OF A THOUSAND LIGHTS, MOTHER OF TEN THOUSAND DARKNESSES...
EEAH EEAH, UTUG, GOCHMAGOCH.

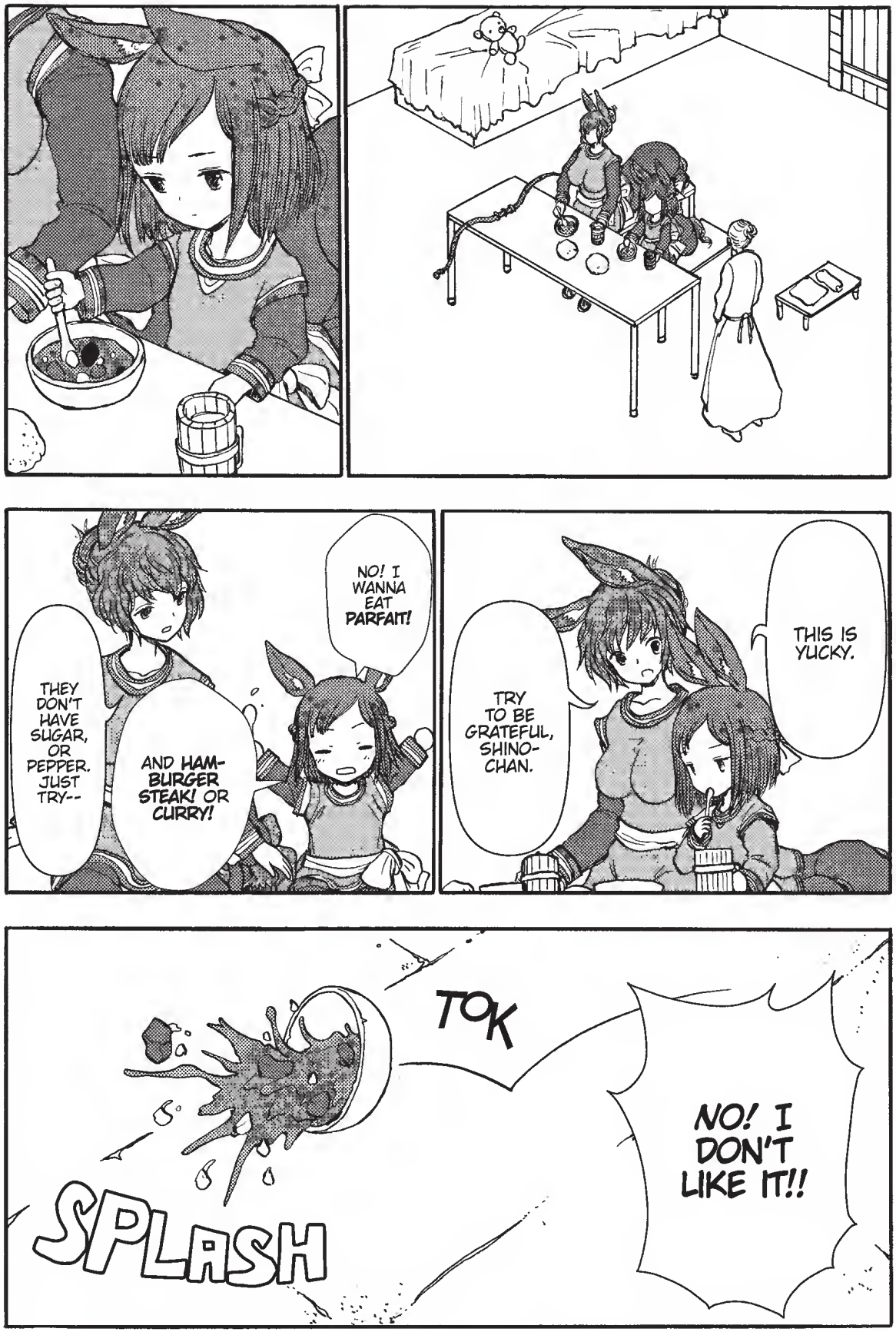

CRACKLE
CRACKLE
ZRRK
BWOOSH
CRACKLE
ZRRK
CRACKLE
CRACKLE
MY GOD!
THE GATE TO HEAVEN OPENS!
ZRRK
STOP THE RITUAL!
SOME-THING'S WRONG!
THE TEMPER-ATURE, PRESSURE, AND COMPO-SITION OF THIS AIR ARE ALL WRONG!
IT'S COLD! AND IT REEKS OF SULFUR!

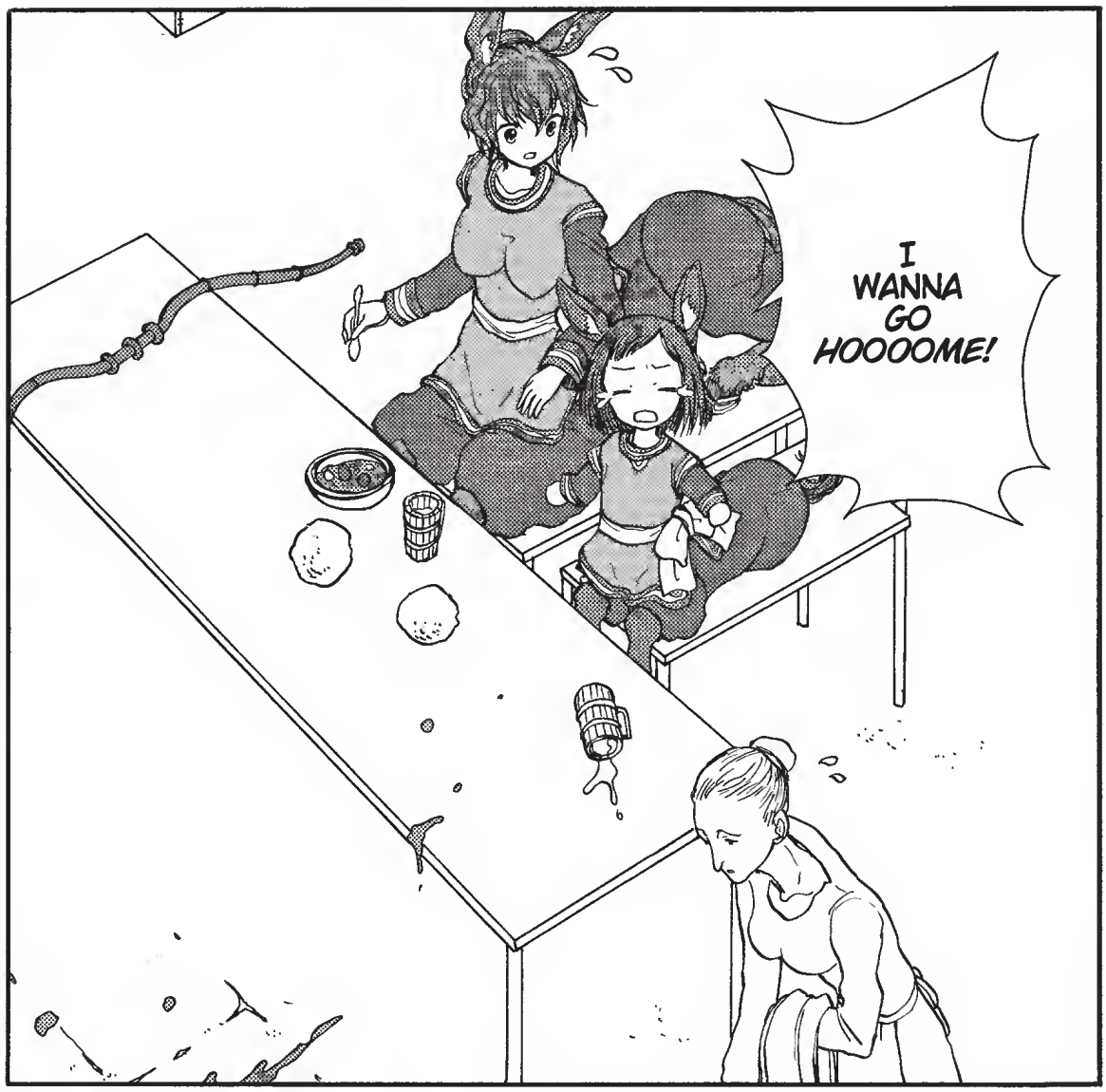
CHAPTER 62

DON'T RUN AWAY! END THE RITUAL!
AIEE!
CHOMP
GROAR
KER-
SNAP
THWUP
CRUNCH
SCREEE
THWOP

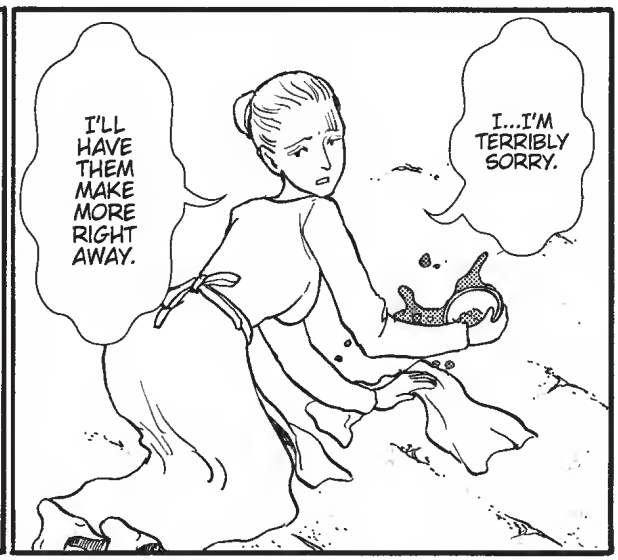

WOOSH
THE FLAMES!
SCRE
EEEE
SHOONK
SHOONK
THE DEVOURING SAND! QUICKLY!
SMOLDER
SMOLDER
CRACKLE
CRACKLE

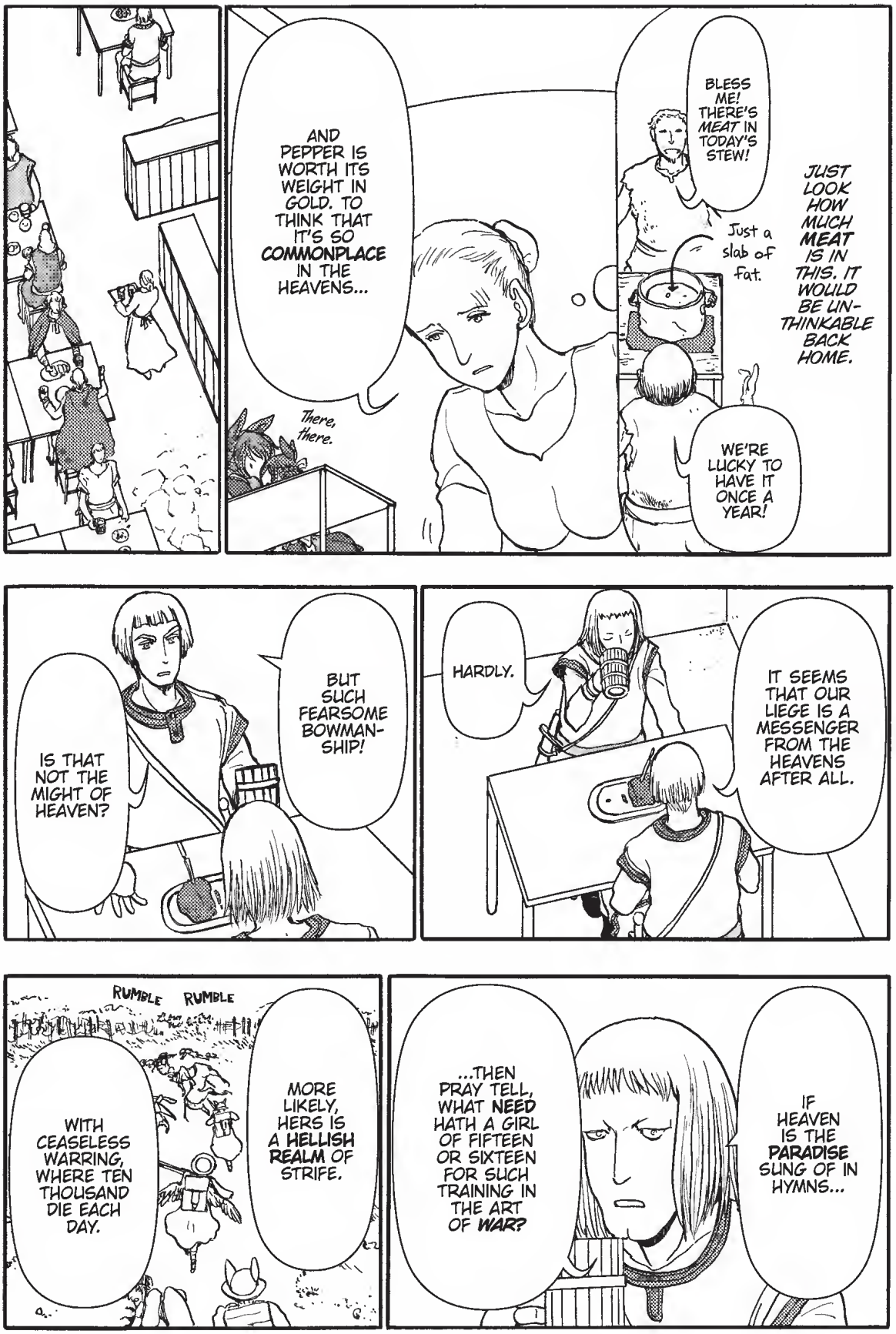
WHAT A DREADFUL CREATURE.
AS ARE YOU.
IN-DEED.
FSSSSS
LET'S HOLD OFF ON THE RITUAL FOR NOW.
WAIT UNTIL WE'RE MORE CERTAIN ABOUT OUR METHODS.
TO SINK AN ARROW INTO A STONE FLOOR...
YOU MAY BE JUST AS DANGER-OUS.
NO. IF WE'RE NOT CAREFUL, IT COULD SPELL THE END OF THE WORLD.
AND RISK SETTING LOOSE SOMETHING THAT WE CAN'T CONTROL?
IF WE SUMMONED THAT BEAST AT THE ENEMY'S STRONGHOLD, WE COULD INCITE PANIC.
PERHAPS WE CAN USE THIS TO OUR ADVANTAGE.

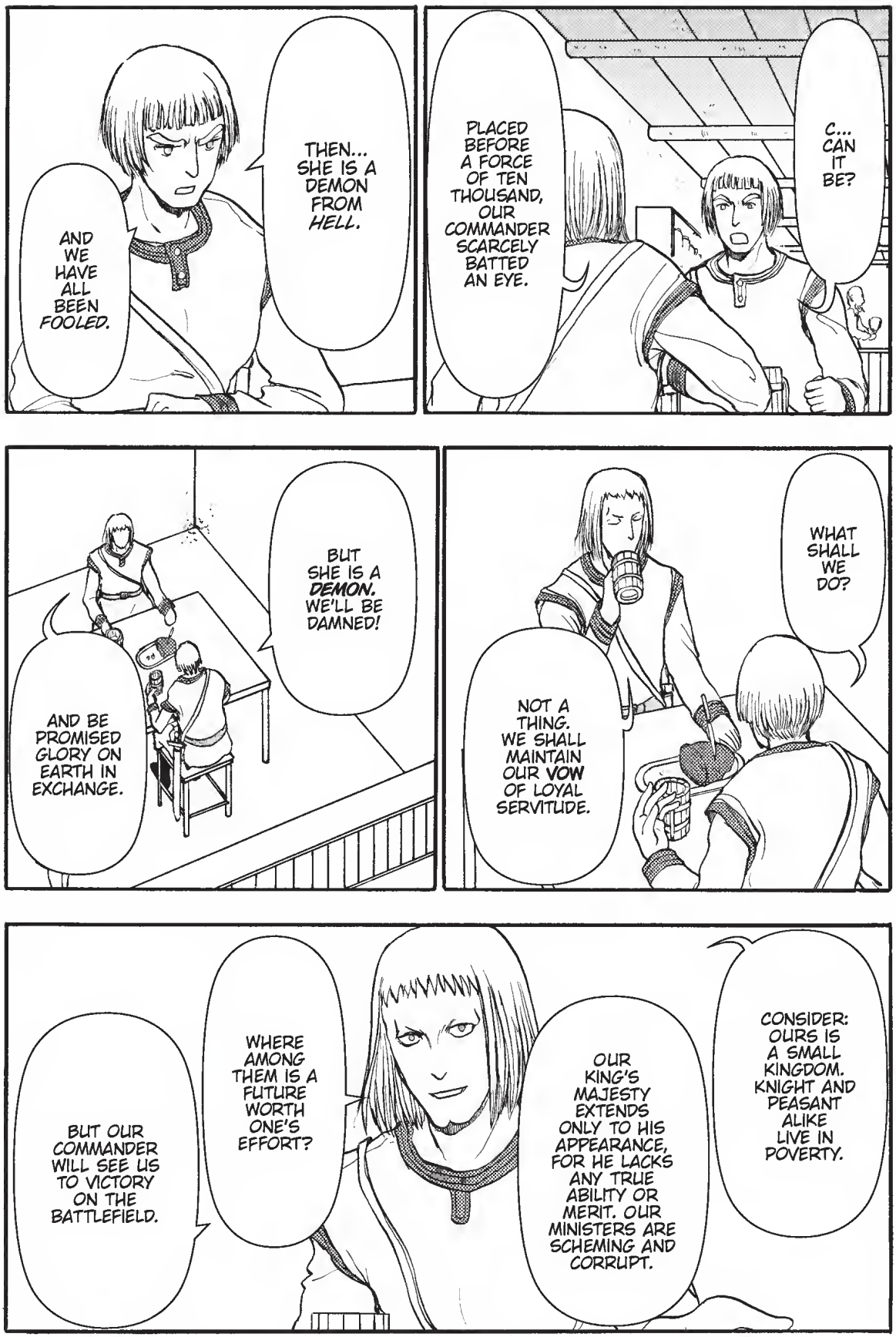

THEY DON'T HAVE SUGAR, OR PEPPER. JUST TRY--
AND HAMBURGER STEAK! OR CURRY!
NO! I WANNA EAT PARFAIT!
TRY TO BE GRATEFUL, SHINO-CHAN.
THIS IS YUCKY.
SPLASH
TOK
NO! I DON'T LIKE IT!!

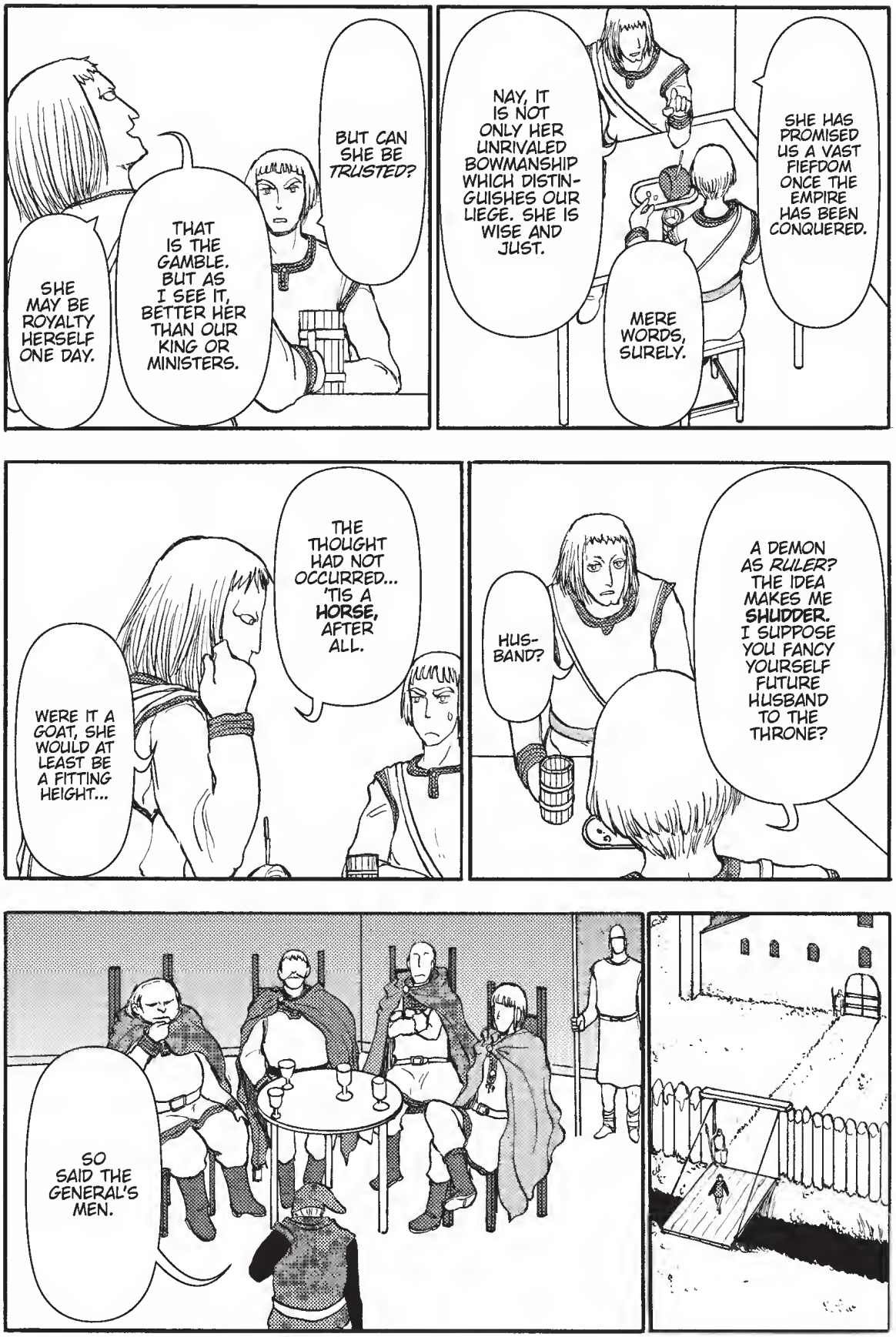

I WANNA GO HOOOOME!

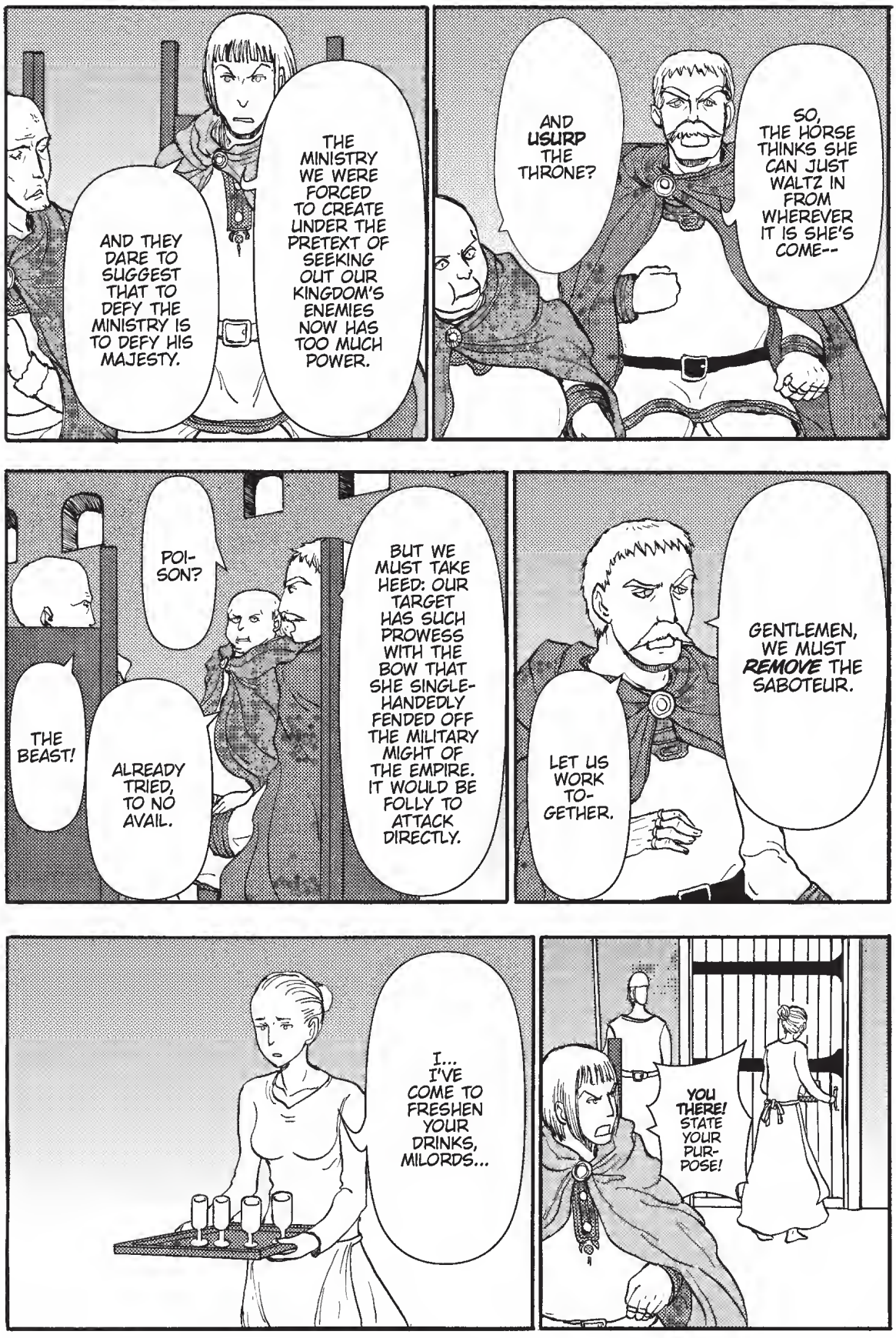
THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY, BUT THANK YOU.


I'LL HAVE THEM MAKE MORE RIGHT AWAY.
I...I'M TERRIBLY SORRY.

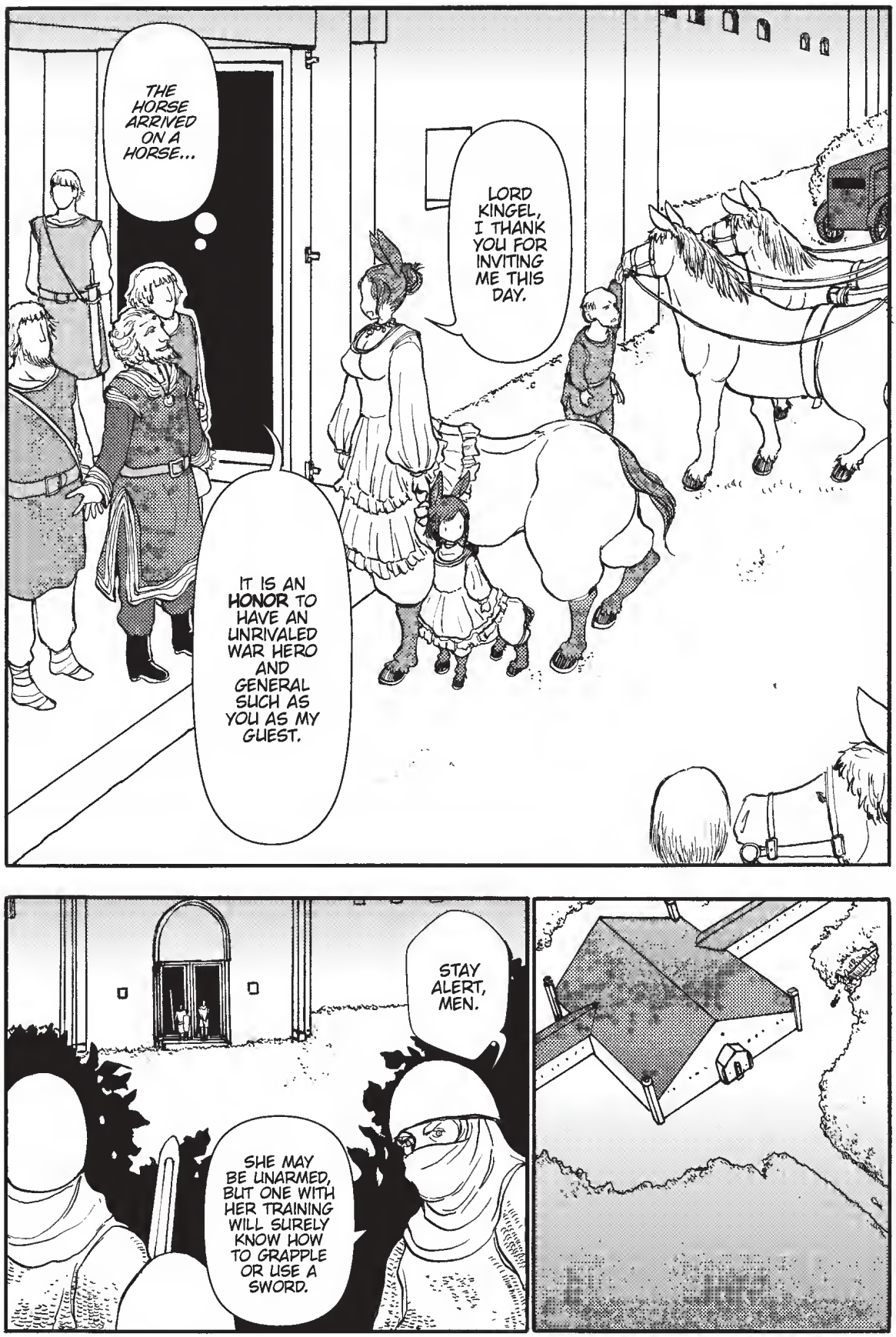

AND PEPPER IS WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD. TO THINK THAT IT'S SO COMMONPLACE IN THE HEAVENS...
There, there.
BLESS ME! THERE'S MEAT IN TODAY'S STEW!
Just a slab of fat.
JUST LOOK HOW MUCH MEAT IS IN THIS. IT WOULD BE UNTHINKABLE BACK HOME.
WE'RE LUCKY TO HAVE IT ONCE A YEAR!
IS THAT NOT THE MIGHT OF HEAVEN?
BUT SUCH FEARSOME BOWMANSHIP!
HARDLY.
IT SEEMS THAT OUR LIEGE IS A MESSENGER FROM THE HEAVENS AFTER ALL.
RUMBLE RUMBLE
WITH CEASELESS WARRING, WHERE TEN THOUSAND DIE EACH DAY.
MORE LIKELY, HERS IS A HELLISH REALM OF STRIFE.
...THEN PRAY TELL, WHAT NEED HATH A GIRL OF FIFTEEN OR SIXTEEN FOR SUCH TRAINING IN THE ART OF WAR?
IF HEAVEN IS THE PARADISE SUNG OF IN HYMNS...

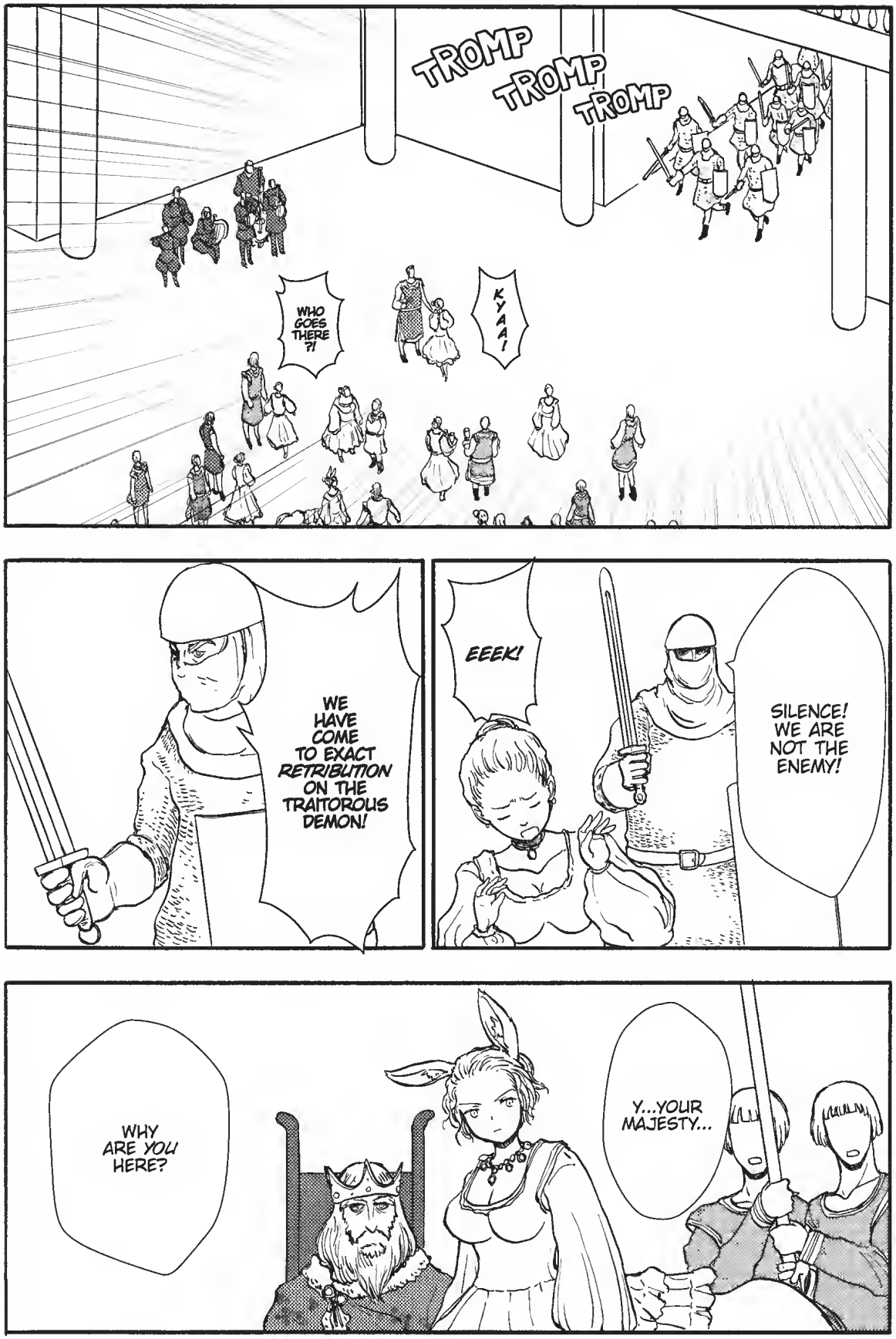

C... CAN IT BE?
PLACED BEFORE A FORCE OF TEN THOUSAND, OUR COMMANDER SCARCELY BATTED AN EYE.
THEN... SHE IS A DEMON FROM HELL.
AND WE HAVE ALL BEEN FOOLED.
WHAT SHALL WE DO?
NOT A THING. WE SHALL MAINTAIN OUR VOW OF LOYAL SERVITUDE.
BUT SHE IS A DEMON. WE'LL BE DAMNED!
AND BE PROMISED GLORY ON EARTH IN EXCHANGE.
CONSIDER: OURS IS A SMALL KINGDOM. KNIGHT AND PEASANT ALIKE LIVE IN POVERTY.
OUR KING'S MAJESTY EXTENDS ONLY TO HIS APPEARANCE, FOR HE LACKS ANY TRUE ABILITY OR MERIT. OUR MINISTERS ARE SCHEMING AND CORRUPT.
WHERE AMONG THEM IS A FUTURE WORTH ONE'S EFFORT?
BUT OUR COMMANDER WILL SEE US TO VICTORY ON THE BATTLEFIELD.


SHE MAY BE ROYALTY HERSELF ONE DAY.
THAT IS THE GAMBLE. BUT AS I SEE IT, BETTER HER THAN OUR KING OR MINISTERS.
BUT CAN SHE BE *TRUSTED?*
NAY, IT IS NOT ONLY HER UNRIVALED BOWMANSHIP WHICH DISTINGUISHES OUR LIEGE. SHE IS WISE AND JUST.
MERE WORDS, SURELY.
SHE HAS PROMISED US A VAST FIEFDOM ONCE THE EMPIRE HAS BEEN CONQUERED.
WERE IT A GOAT, SHE WOULD AT LEAST BE A FITTING HEIGHT...
THE THOUGHT HAD NOT OCCURRED... 'TIS A **HORSE,** AFTER ALL.
HUS-BAND?
A DEMON AS *RULER?* THE IDEA MAKES ME **SHUDDER.** I SUPPOSE YOU FANCY YOURSELF FUTURE HUSBAND TO THE THRONE?
SO SAID THE GENERAL'S MEN.


THE MINISTRY WE WERE FORCED TO CREATE UNDER THE PRETEXT OF SEEKING OUT OUR KINGDOM'S ENEMIES NOW HAS TOO MUCH POWER.
AND THEY DARE TO SUGGEST THAT TO DEFY THE MINISTRY IS TO DEFY HIS MAJESTY.
SO, THE HORSE THINKS SHE CAN JUST WALTZ IN FROM WHEREVER IT IS SHE'S COME--
AND USURP THE THRONE?
BUT WE MUST TAKE HEED: OUR TARGET HAS SUCH PROWESS WITH THE BOW THAT SHE SINGLE-HANDEDLY FENDED OFF THE MILITARY MIGHT OF THE EMPIRE. IT WOULD BE FOLLY TO ATTACK DIRECTLY.
POI-SON?
ALREADY TRIED, TO NO AVAIL.
THE BEAST!
GENTLEMEN, WE MUST REMOVE THE SABOTEUR.
LET US WORK TO-GETHER.
I... I'VE COME TO FRESHEN YOUR DRINKS, MILORDS...
YOU THERE! STATE YOUR PUR-POSE!

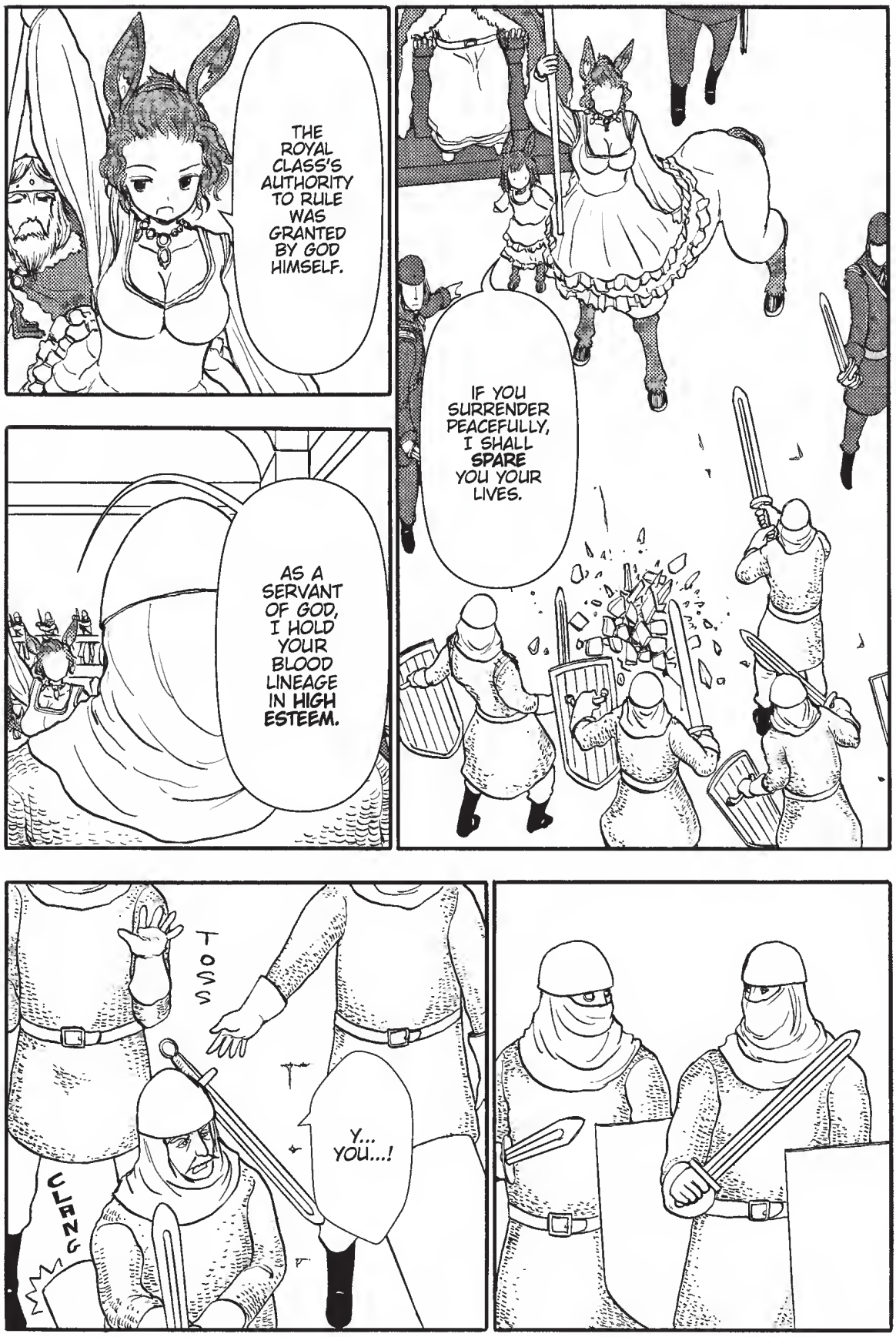
NO ONE IS TO ENTER!
O...OF COURSE.
SLAP
Gyah!
YOU SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN TO INTERRUPT A PRIVATE MEETING!
WHY ARE YOU STILL HERE?! GET OUT! YOU CAN CLEAN LATER!
I HAVE AN IDEA.
WE'LL INVITE HER TO A BANQUET. THERE, WE'LL SURROUND AND KILL HER.
UNCIVILIZED PEASANT. UTTERLY USELESS!
I THINK LORD KINGEL SHOULD ARRANGE THE BANQUET AND INVITATION.
HE CLAIMS NEUTRALITY, BUT SECRETLY SIDES WITH US.
GOOD. I'LL LEAVE THE ARRANGE-MENTS TO YOU.

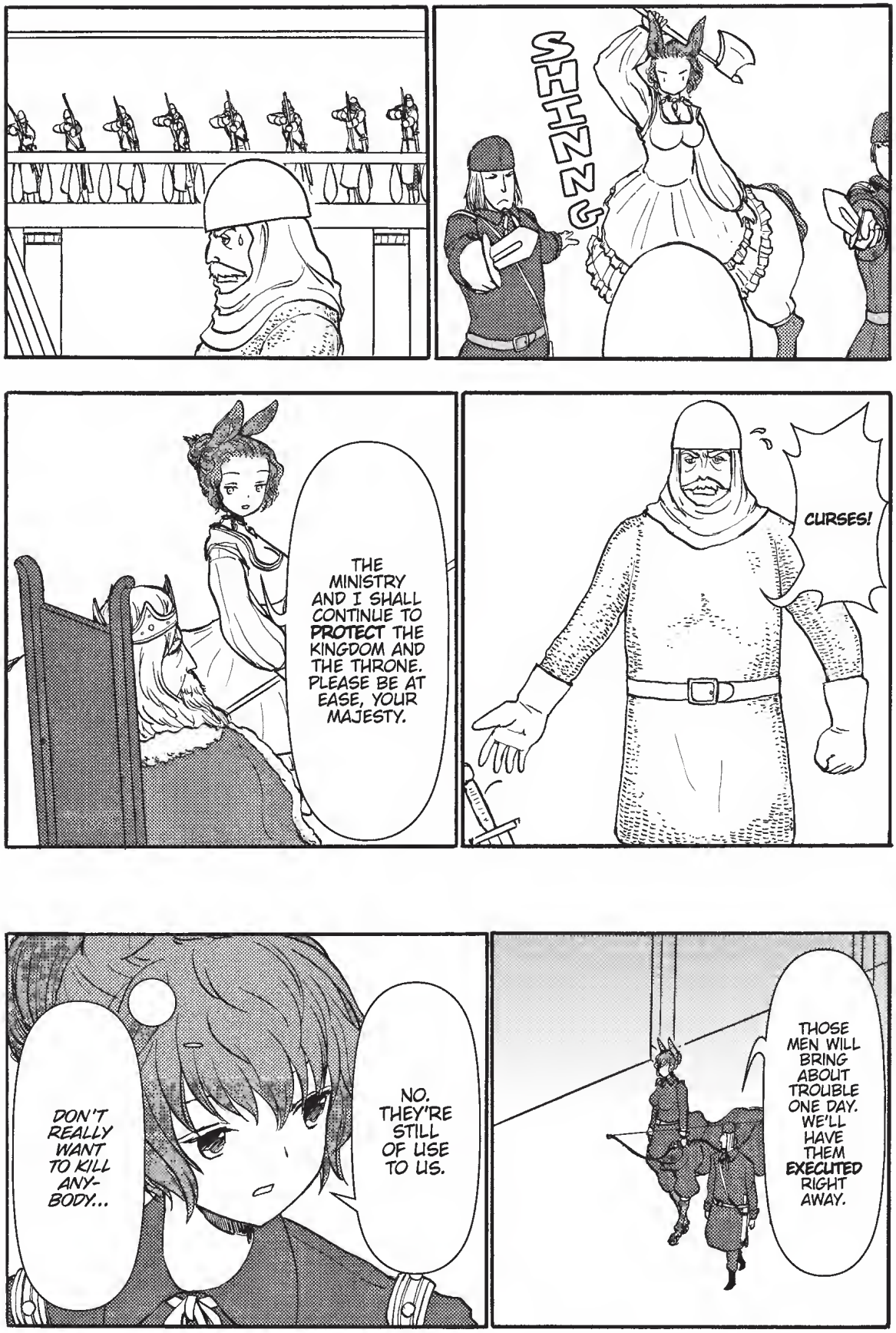

THE HORSE ARRIVED ON A HORSE...
LORD KINGEL, I THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME THIS DAY.
IT IS AN **HONOR** TO HAVE AN UNRIVALED WAR HERO AND GENERAL SUCH AS YOU AS MY GUEST.
STAY ALERT, MEN.
SHE MAY BE UNARMED, BUT ONE WITH HER TRAINING WILL SURELY KNOW HOW TO GRAPPLE OR USE A SWORD.


TROMP
TROMP
TROMP
WHO GOES THERE?!
KYAA!
WE HAVE COME TO EXACT RETRIBUTION ON THE TRAITOROUS DEMON!
EEEK!
SILENCE! WE ARE NOT THE ENEMY!
WHY ARE YOU HERE?
Y...YOUR MAJESTY...

THKK
WH... WHAT IS GOING ON, HERE?
TRAITORS!
YOU WOULD *DARE* DRAW ARMS UPON HIS MAJ-ESTY?

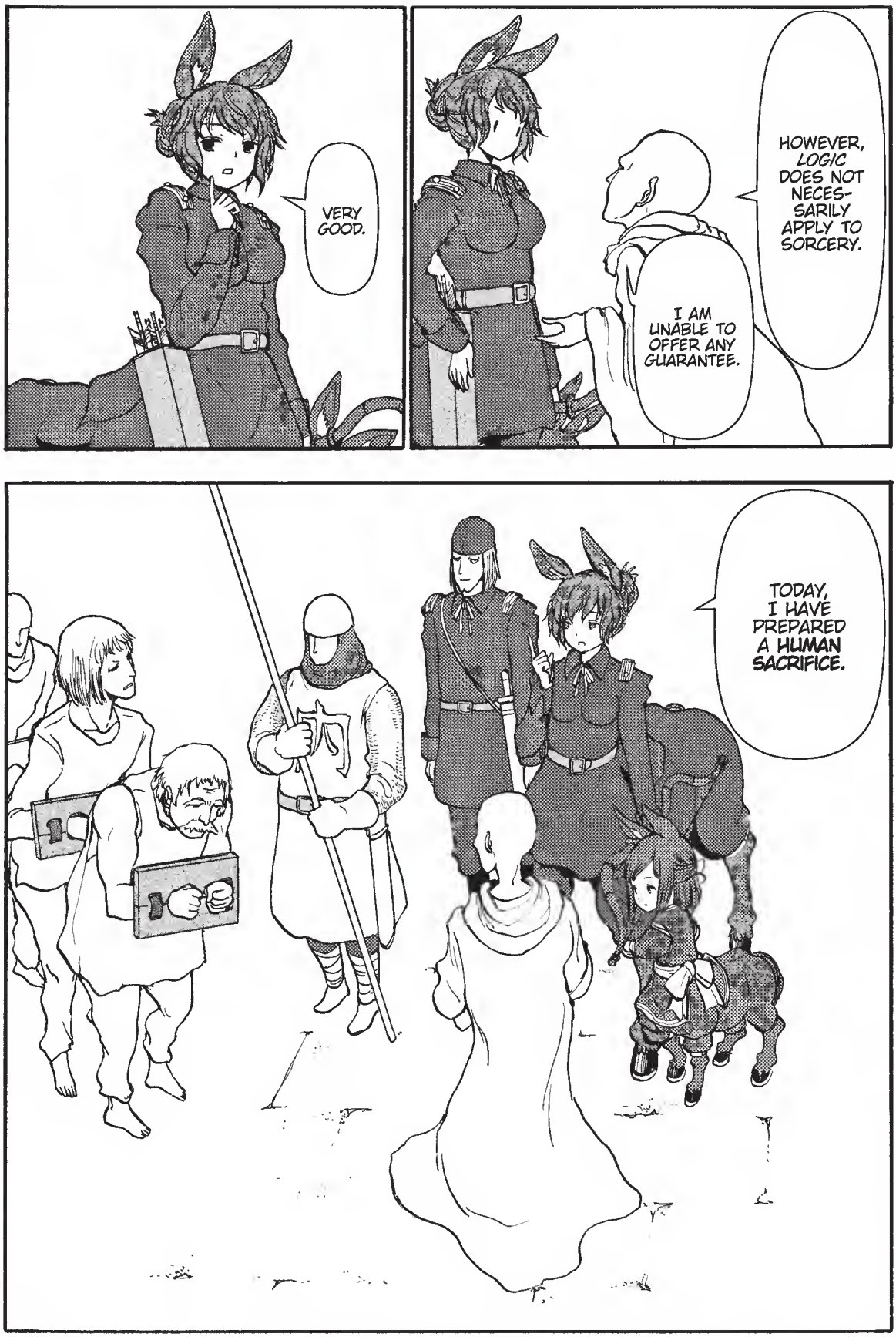
IT IS YOU WHO ARE THE TRAITORS!
ON THE CONTRARY. LORD KINGEL HAS REMAINED A LOYAL VASSAL!
LORD KINGEL IS A TRAITOR!
LAY DOWN YOUR SWORDS PEACE-FULLY!
OW, OW, OW! MY HAND...!
WH-CRACK
GRR... IF IT'S COME TO THIS...

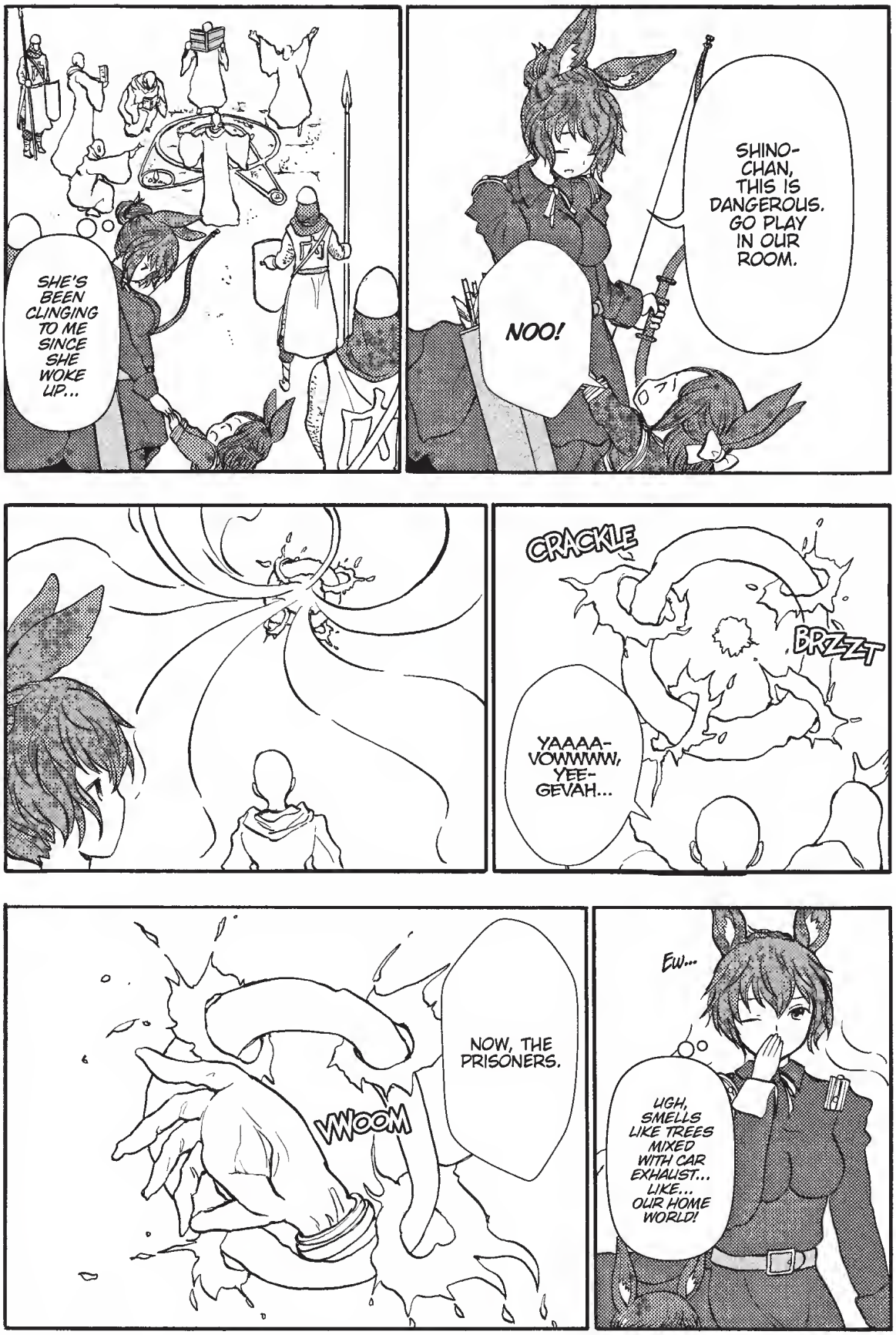

THE ROYAL CLASS'S AUTHORITY TO RULE WAS GRANTED BY GOD HIMSELF.
IF YOU SURRENDER PEACEFULLY, I SHALL SPARE YOU YOUR LIVES.
AS A SERVANT OF GOD, I HOLD YOUR BLOOD LINEAGE IN HIGH ESTEEM.
TOSS
CLANG
Y... YOU...!


SHINNG
THE MINISTRY AND I SHALL CONTINUE TO PROTECT THE KINGDOM AND THE THRONE. PLEASE BE AT EASE, YOUR MAJESTY.
CURSES!
THOSE MEN WILL BRING ABOUT TROUBLE ONE DAY. WE'LL HAVE THEM EXECUTED RIGHT AWAY.
NO. THEY'RE STILL OF USE TO US.
DON'T REALLY WANT TO KILL ANY-BODY...

TROUBLED BY THE SIGHT OF BLOOD, IS SHE?
SO, SHE'S JUST A YOUNG GIRL AFTER ALL.
LOCK THEM AWAY BENEATH THE TOWER AND SMOKE OUT ANY SYMPA-THIZERS.
OF COURSE.
ON SECOND THOUGHT, I MUSTN'T BE FOOLED BY HER VOICE OR APPEAR-ANCE.
ONCE STABILITY HAS RETURNED TO THE KINGDOM, WE WILL EMBARK ON CONQUERING THE GLYCOL EMPIRE.
AHH, AT LONG LAST.
A UNIFIED LAW TO REIGN OVER THE LAND... EDUCATION, WELFARE, PUBLIC HEALTH. THE WORLD WILL BE BORN ANEW.
MY ARM GROWS RESTLESS.
THINK ABOUT WHERE YOU'D LIKE A DOMAIN, AS WELL.

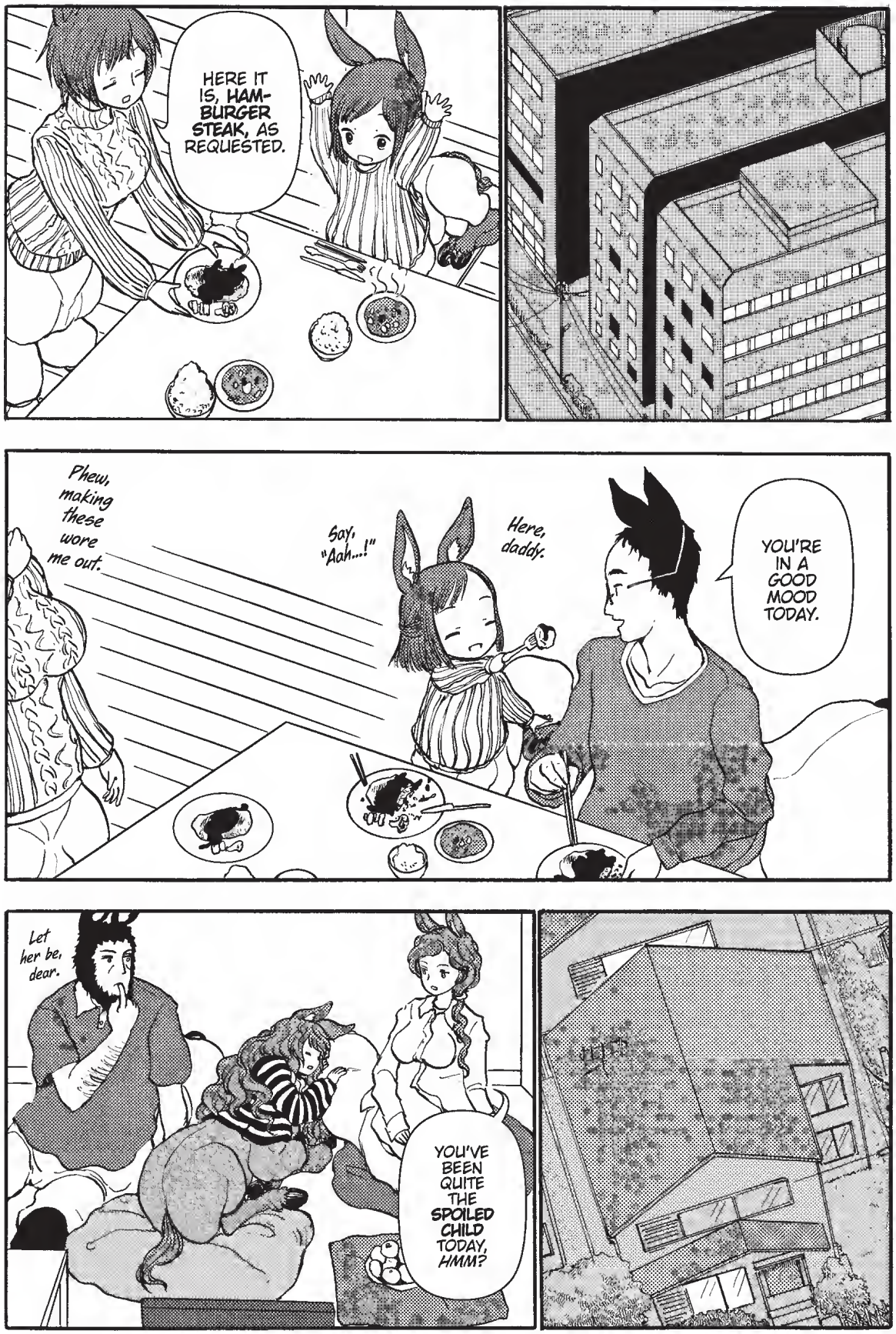
IT'S NOT GUARANTEED THAT LIVES WILL BE LOST, BUT I DON'T WANT TO ENDANGER THOSE LOYAL TO ME.
LET'S HAVE THOSE MEN TAKE PART IN THE RITUAL.
AH, YES.
THE RITUAL SHOULD GO JUST AS IT DID WHEN WE SUMMONED YOU, MILADY.
WE'VE SCOURED EVERY DOCUMENT WE COULD FIND.


VERY GOOD.
HOWEVER, LOGIC DOES NOT NECESSARILY APPLY TO SORCERY.
I AM UNABLE TO OFFER ANY GUARANTEE.
TODAY, I HAVE PREPARED A HUMAN SACRIFICE.


SHE'S BEEN CLINGING TO ME SINCE SHE WOKE UP...
SHINO-CHAN, THIS IS DANGEROUS. GO PLAY IN OUR ROOM.
NOO!
CRACKLE
BRZZZT
YAAAA-VOWWWW, YEE-GEVAH...
VWOOM
NOW, THE PRISONERS.
EW...
UGH, SMELLS LIKE TREES MIXED WITH CAR EXHAUST... LIKE... OUR HOME WORLD!

HUH?
GLANCE
GLANCE
?
?

HOW DID WE FALL ASLEEP?
DO YOU REMEMB-ER?
Hime-chaaan! Shino-chaaan!
SHAKE SHAKE


HERE IT IS, HAMBURGER STEAK, AS REQUESTED.
Phew, making these wore me out.
Say, "Aah...!"
Here, daddy.
YOU'RE IN A GOOD MOOD TODAY.
Let her be, dear.
YOU'VE BEEN QUITE THE SPOILED CHILD TODAY, HMM?

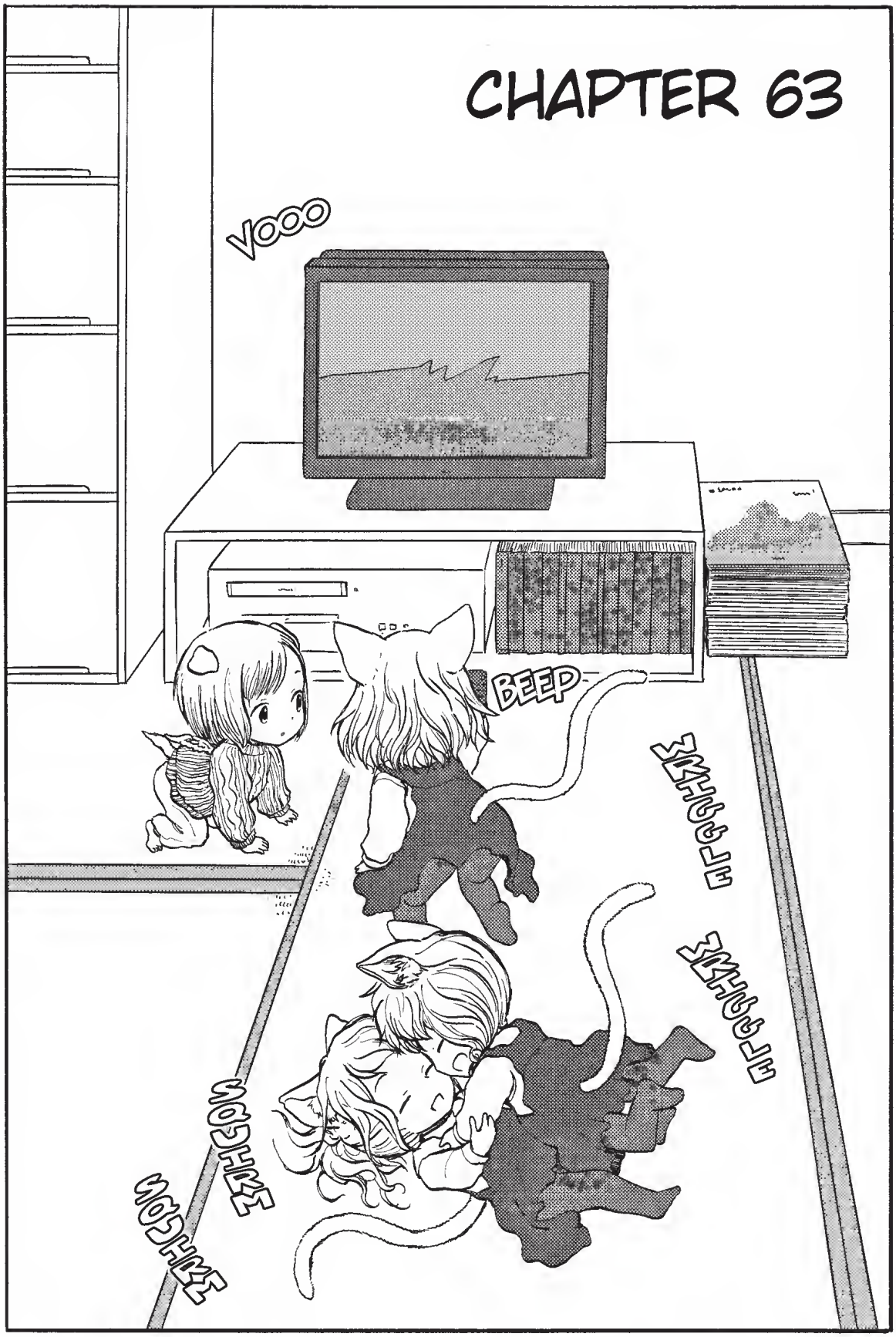
A CentaUr's Life

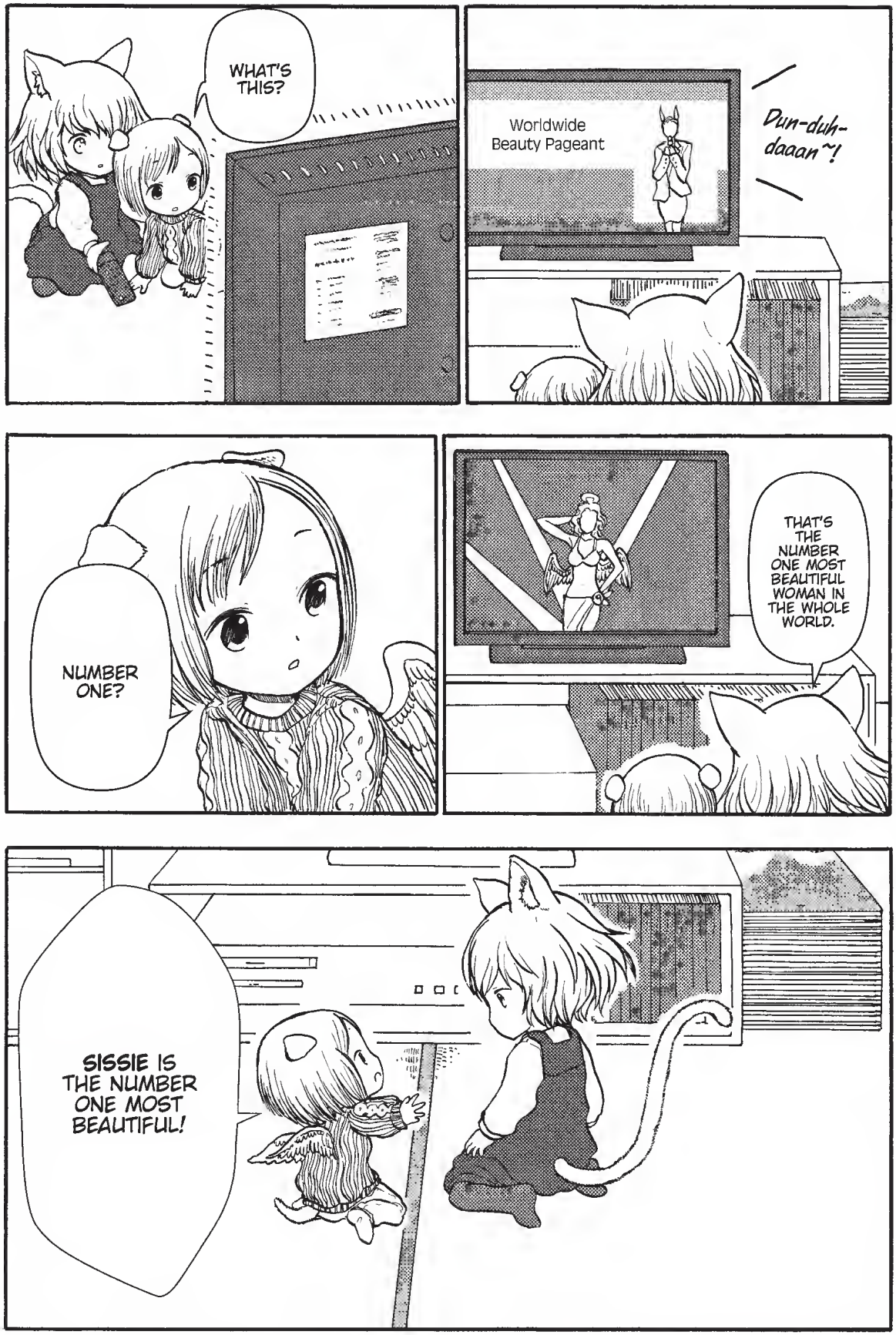
JAPANESE *YOKAI*
KAPPA

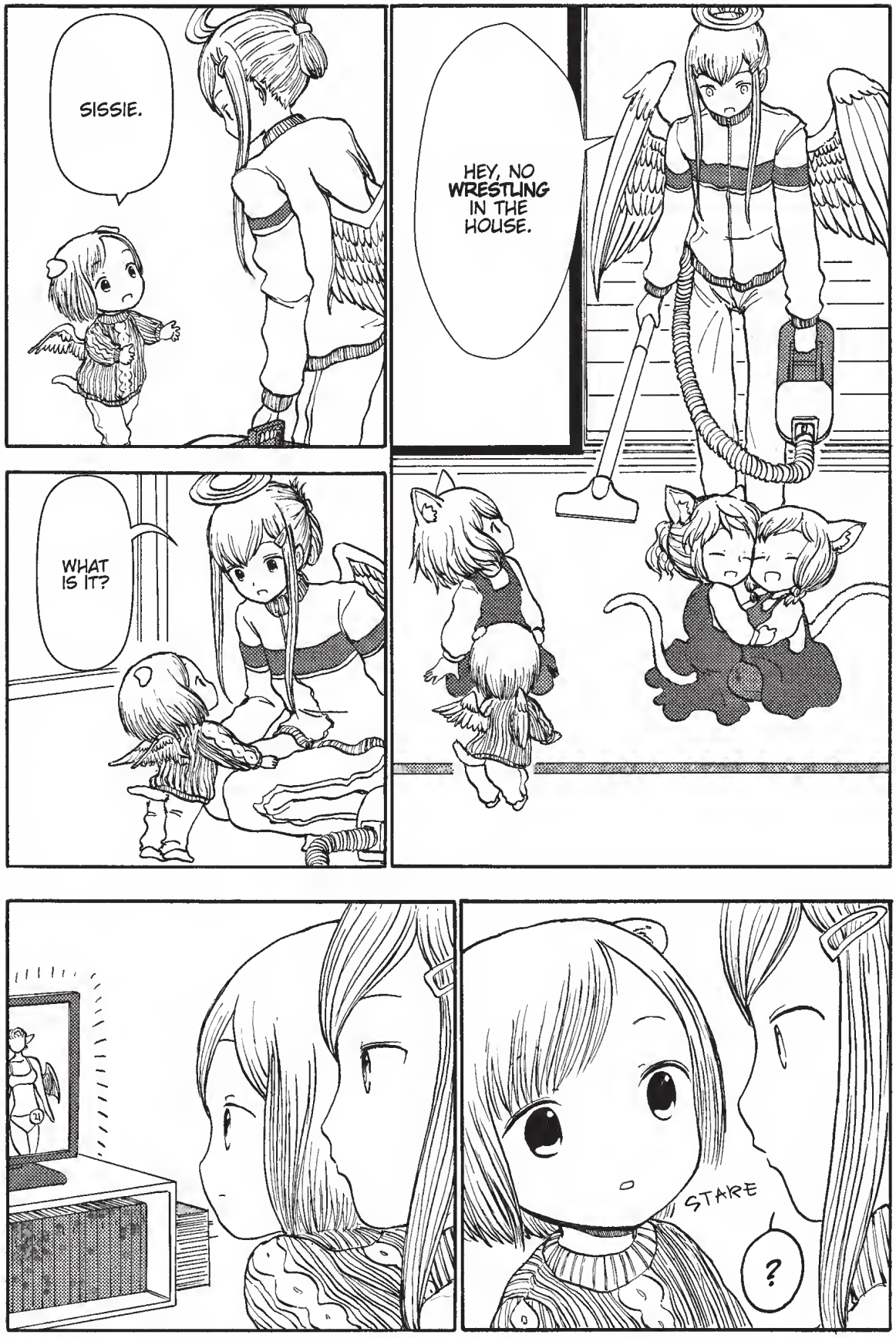
THE KAPPA IS NOT ONLY THE MOST WIDELY CELEBRATED *YOKAI*, BUT ALSO ONE OF THE MOST WIDELY FICTIONALIZED. KAPPA LORE CAN BE FOUND IN VIRTUALLY ALL REGIONS OF JAPAN, BUT THE DETAILS VARY WIDELY FROM ONE REGION TO THE NEXT. SOME SAY THAT KAPPA ARE *KAHAKU* RIVER GODS THAT CAME OVER FROM THE MAINLAND, WHILE OTHERS CLAIM THEY ARE MOUNTAIN RIVER SPIRITS THAT RETURN TO THE MOUNTAINS IN THE AUTUMN. THE KAPPA SHARES THE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF FISH, AMPHIBIANS, AND AQUATIC REPTILES IN SOME STORIES, WHILE IN OTHERS IT RESEMBLES A MONKEY. IN SHORT, IT IS LIKELY THAT PEOPLE REFERRED TO ANY ODDITY SPOTTED BY THE WATER AS A KAPPA.

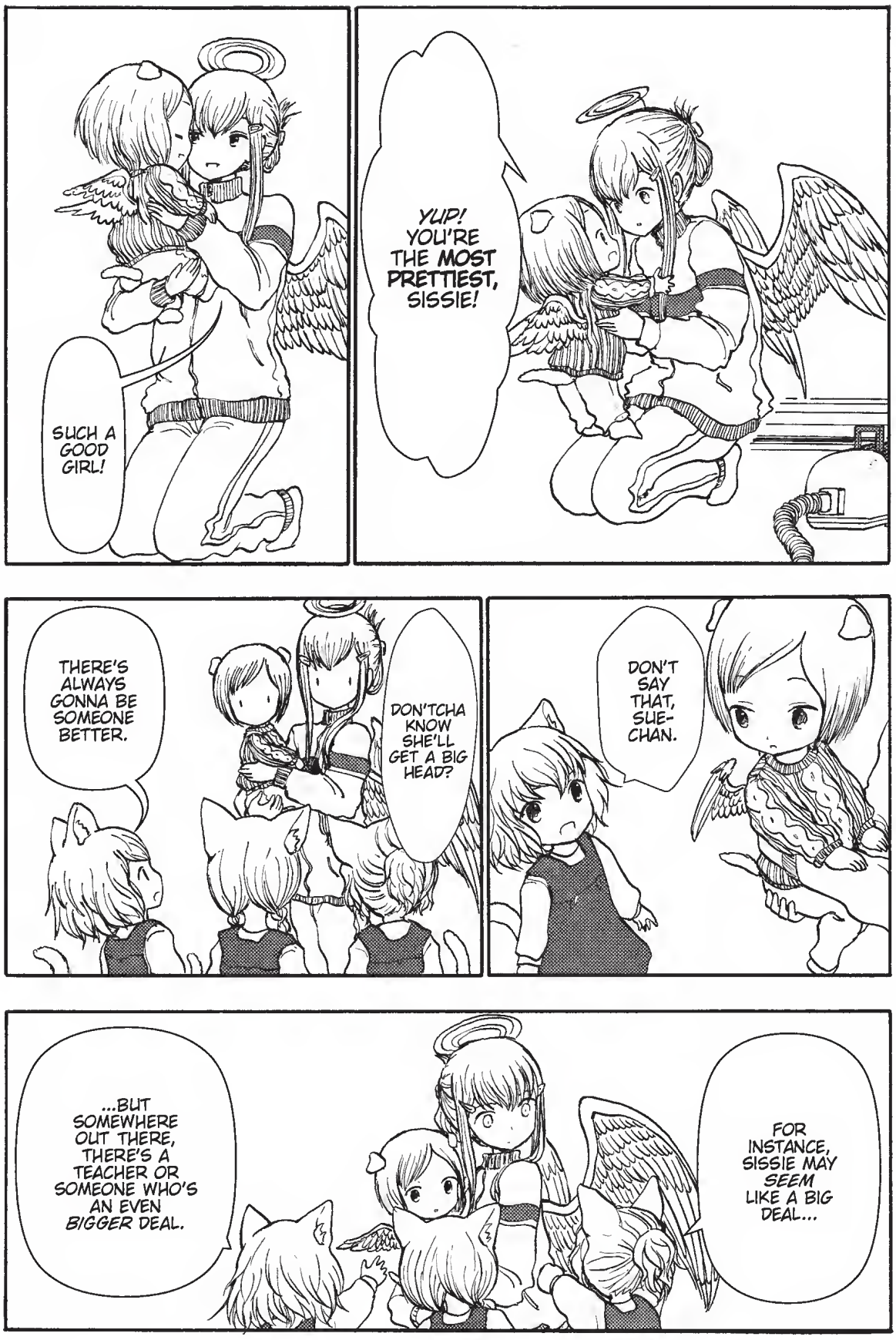
IN TERMS OF SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATIONS, THIS *YOKAI* MAY HAVE ORIGINATED WITH THE MISIDENTIFICATION OF A RIVER OTTER OR OTHER CREATURE. THERE IS ALSO A THEORY THAT THE KAPPA ARE ACTUALLY AMPHIBIANFOLK, BUT THERE IS CURRENTLY NO EVIDENCE SUGGESTING AN AMPHIBIANFOLK PRESENCE IN JAPAN PRIOR TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

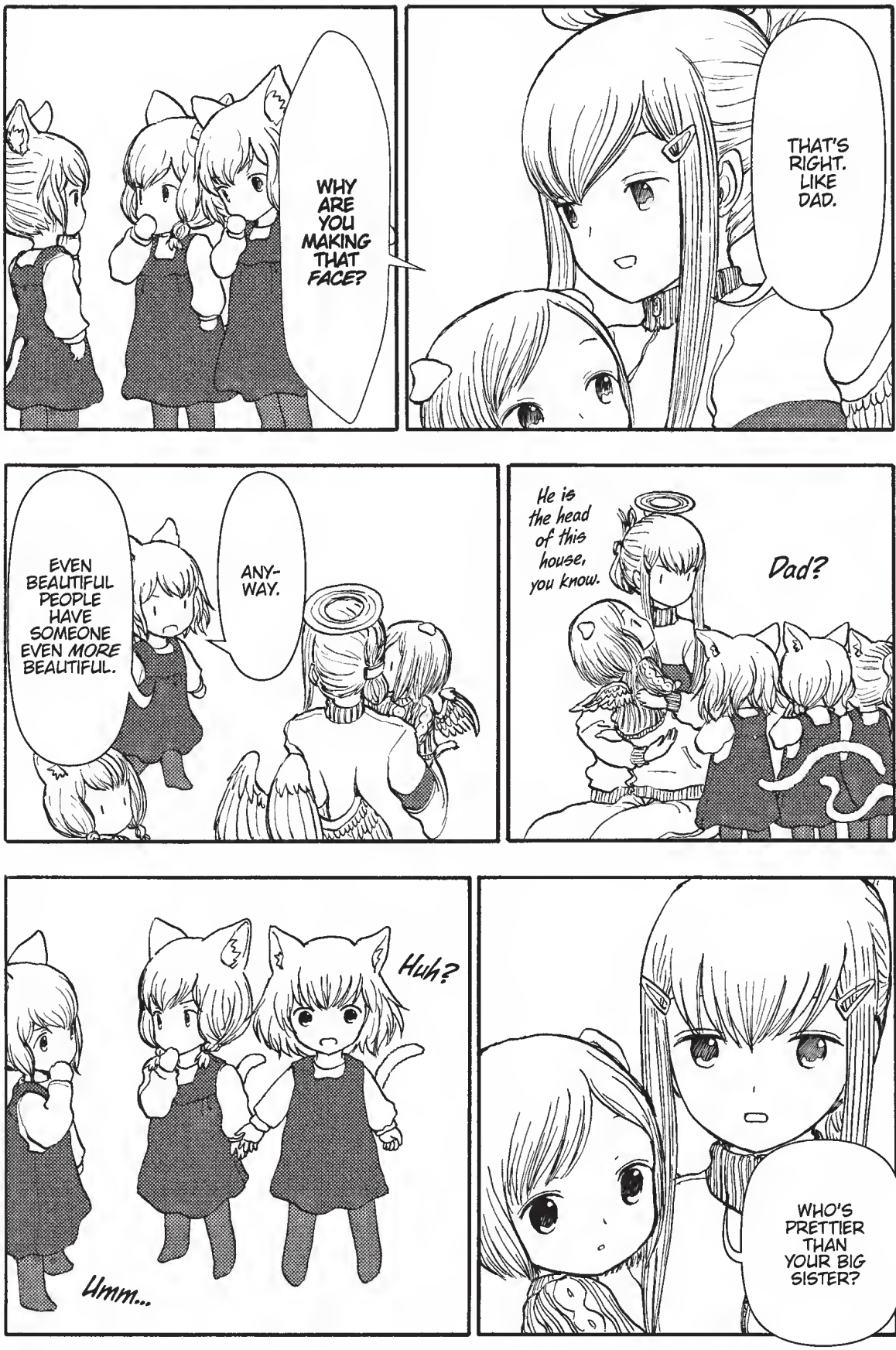
DUE TO DIFFERENCES IN REGIONAL FOLKLORE, KAPPA WERE NOT WELL-DEFINED UNTIL THE PROPAGATION OF INFORMATION THROUGH TECHNOLOGY IN THE MODERN AGE, WHICH GRADUALLY LED TO A CONSISTENT DESCRIPTION: IT HAS A DISH ON TOP OF ITS HEAD THAT MUST REMAIN WET OR THE KAPPA WILL LOSE ITS POWER; IT HAS A TURTLE-LIKE BEAK AND SHELL; IT ENJOYS SUMO WRESTLING AND CUCUMBERS; AND SO ON. WHILE ARTISTIC REPRESENTATIONS STILL VARY FROM ONE WORK TO THE NEXT, ALL MODERN DEPICTIONS OF KAPPA GENERALLY CONFORM TO THESE TRAITS. THIS SPEAKS NOT ONLY TO THE POWER OF MASS MEDIA, BUT ALSO TO THE STRENGTH OF A POLISHED, RECOGNIZABLE CHARACTER.

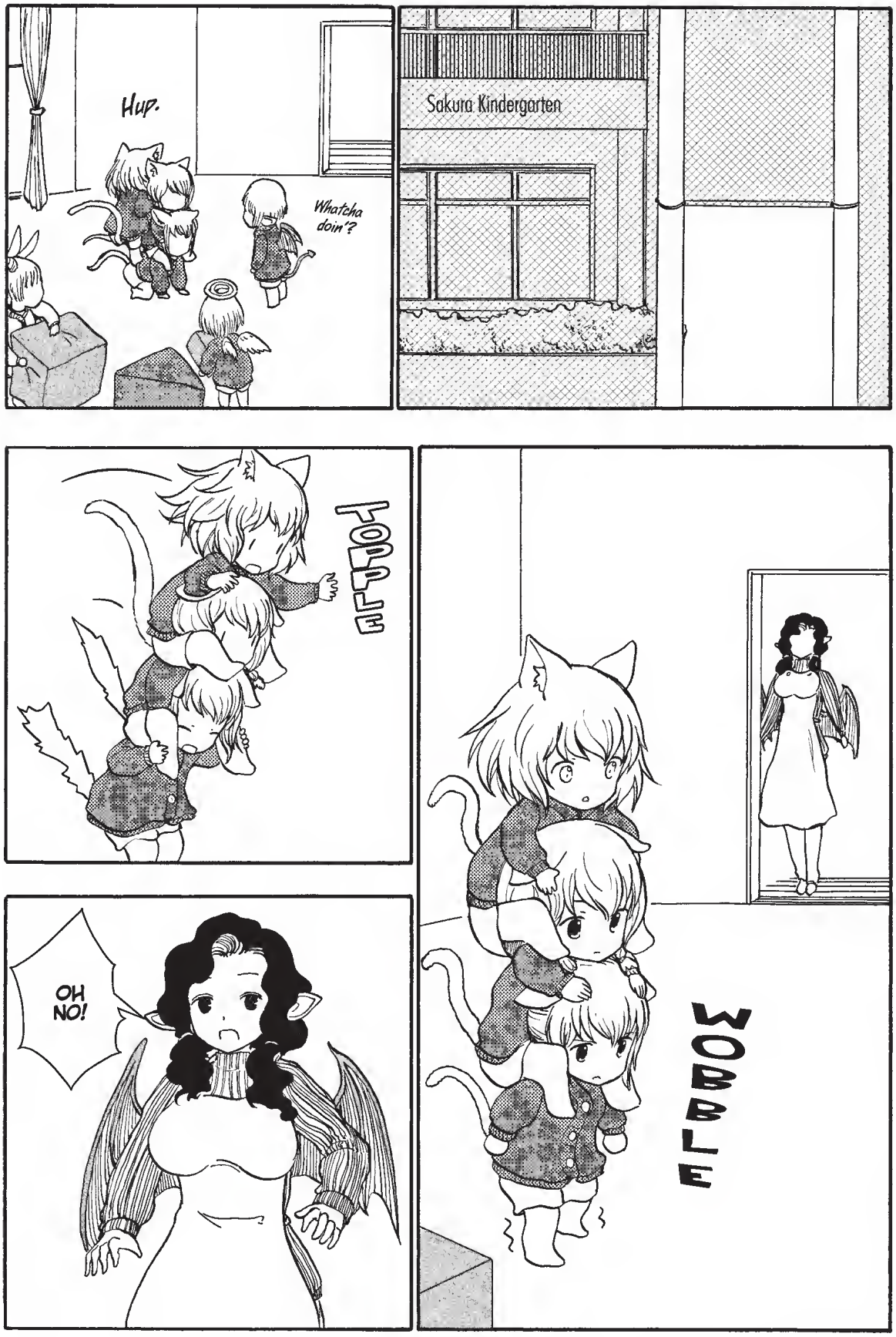

CHAPTER 63
VOOO
BEEP
WHIGGLE
WHIGGLE
SQUIRM
SQUIRM

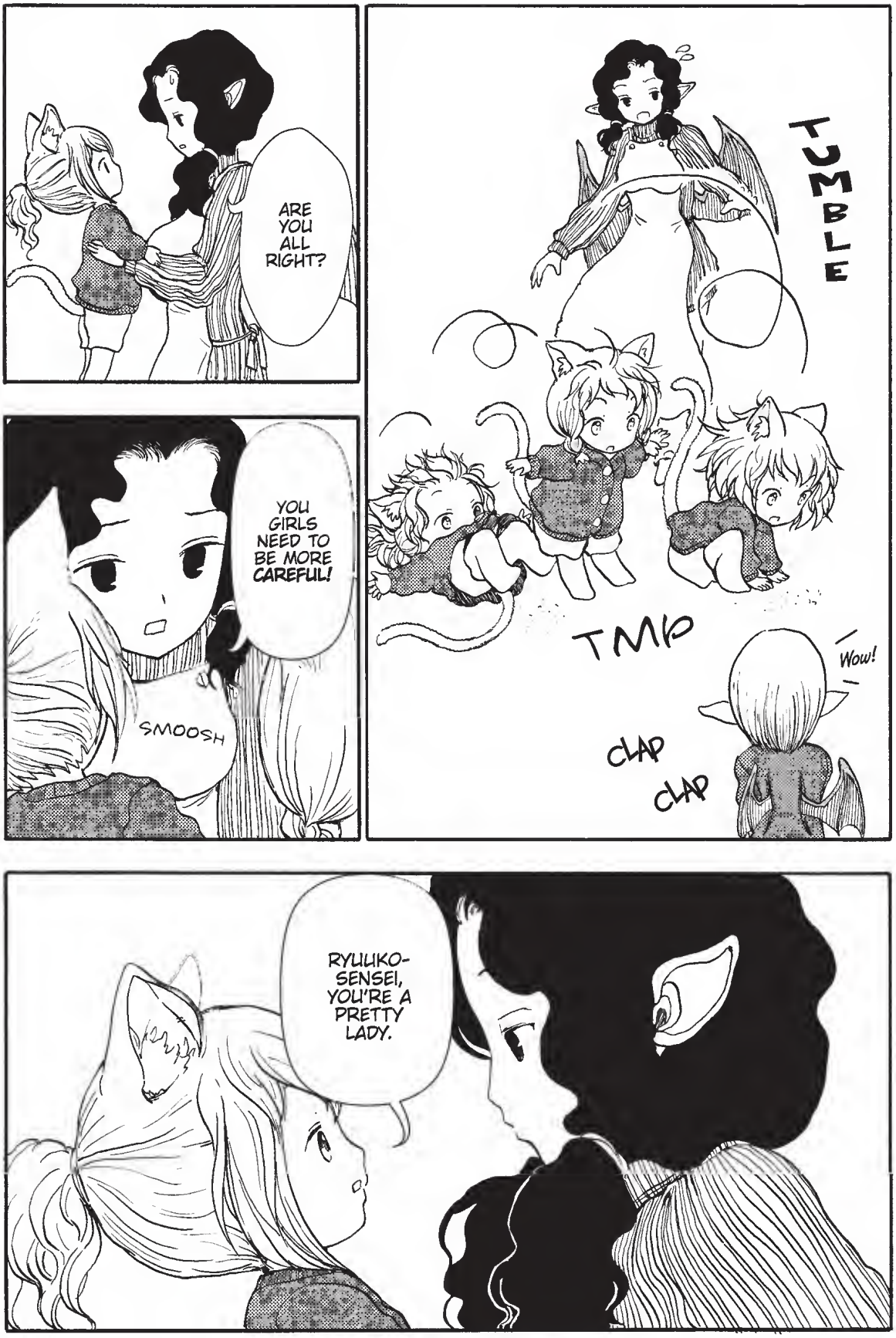

WHAT'S THIS?
Worldwide Beauty Pageant
Dun-duh-daaan~!
NUMBER ONE?
THAT'S THE NUMBER ONE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN THE WHOLE WORLD.
SISSIE IS THE NUMBER ONE MOST BEAUTIFUL!

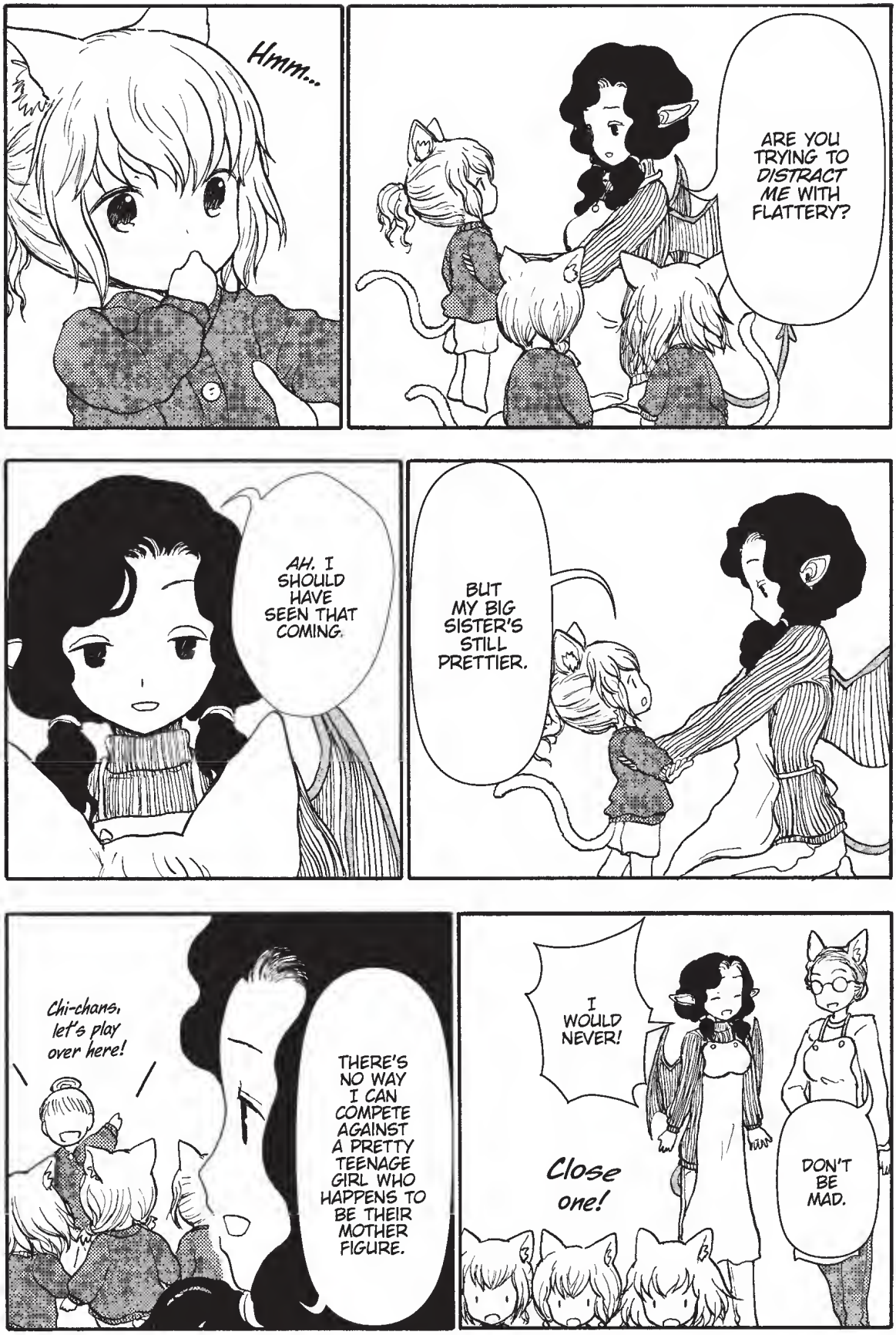

SISSIE.
HEY, NO WRESTLING IN THE HOUSE.
WHAT IS IT?
STARE
?

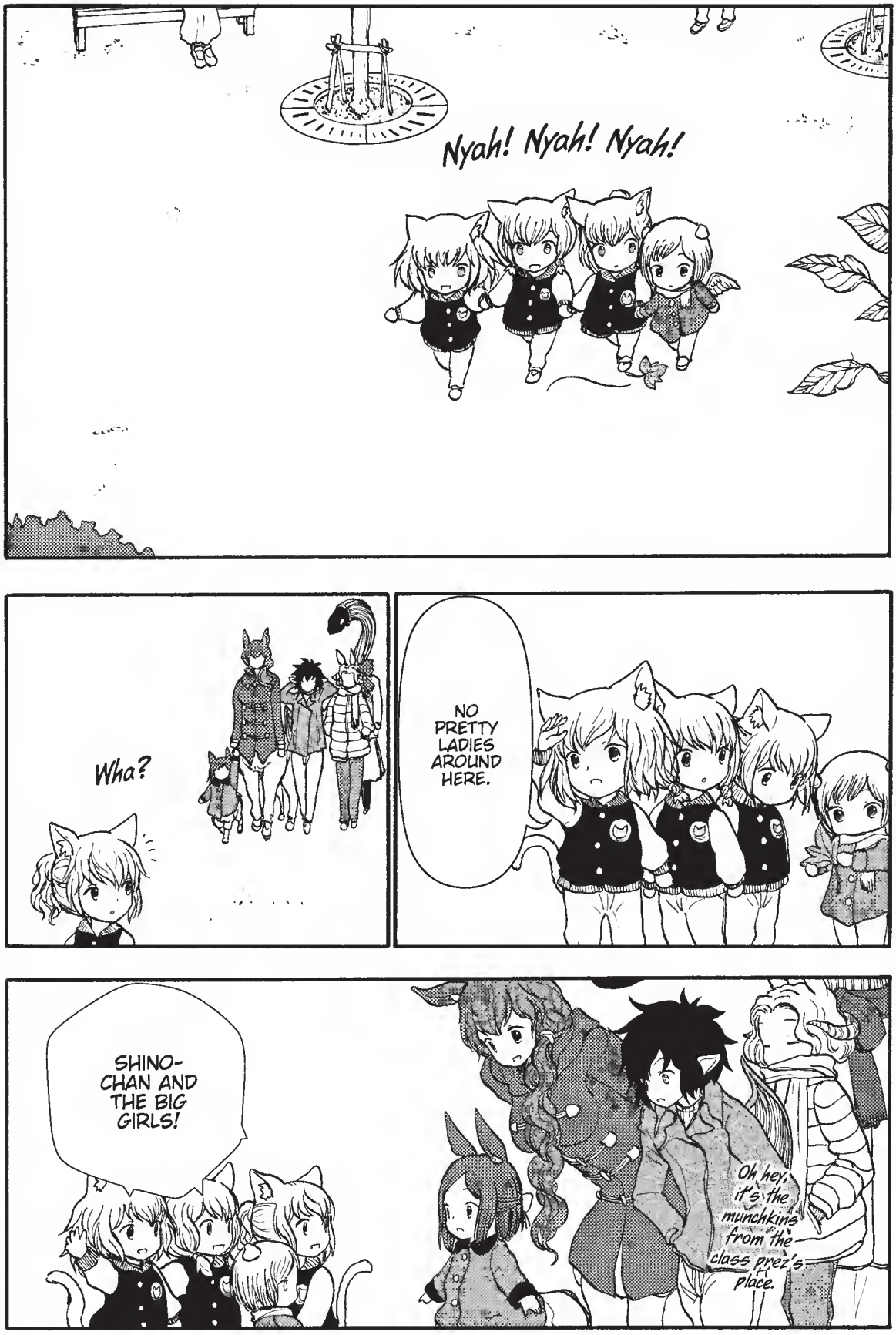

SUCH A GOOD GIRL!
YUP! YOU'RE THE MOST PRETTIEST, SISSIE!
THERE'S ALWAYS GONNA BE SOMEONE BETTER.
DON'TCHA KNOW SHE'LL GET A BIG HEAD?
DON'T SAY THAT, SUE-CHAN.
...BUT SOMEWHERE OUT THERE, THERE'S A TEACHER OR SOMEONE WHO'S AN EVEN BIGGER DEAL.
FOR INSTANCE, SISSIE MAY SEEM LIKE A BIG DEAL...


WHY ARE YOU MAKING THAT FACE?
THAT'S RIGHT. LIKE DAD.
EVEN BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE HAVE SOMEONE EVEN MORE BEAUTIFUL.
ANY-WAY.
He is the head of this house, you know.
Dad?
Huh?
Umm...
WHO'S PRETTIER THAN YOUR BIG SISTER?

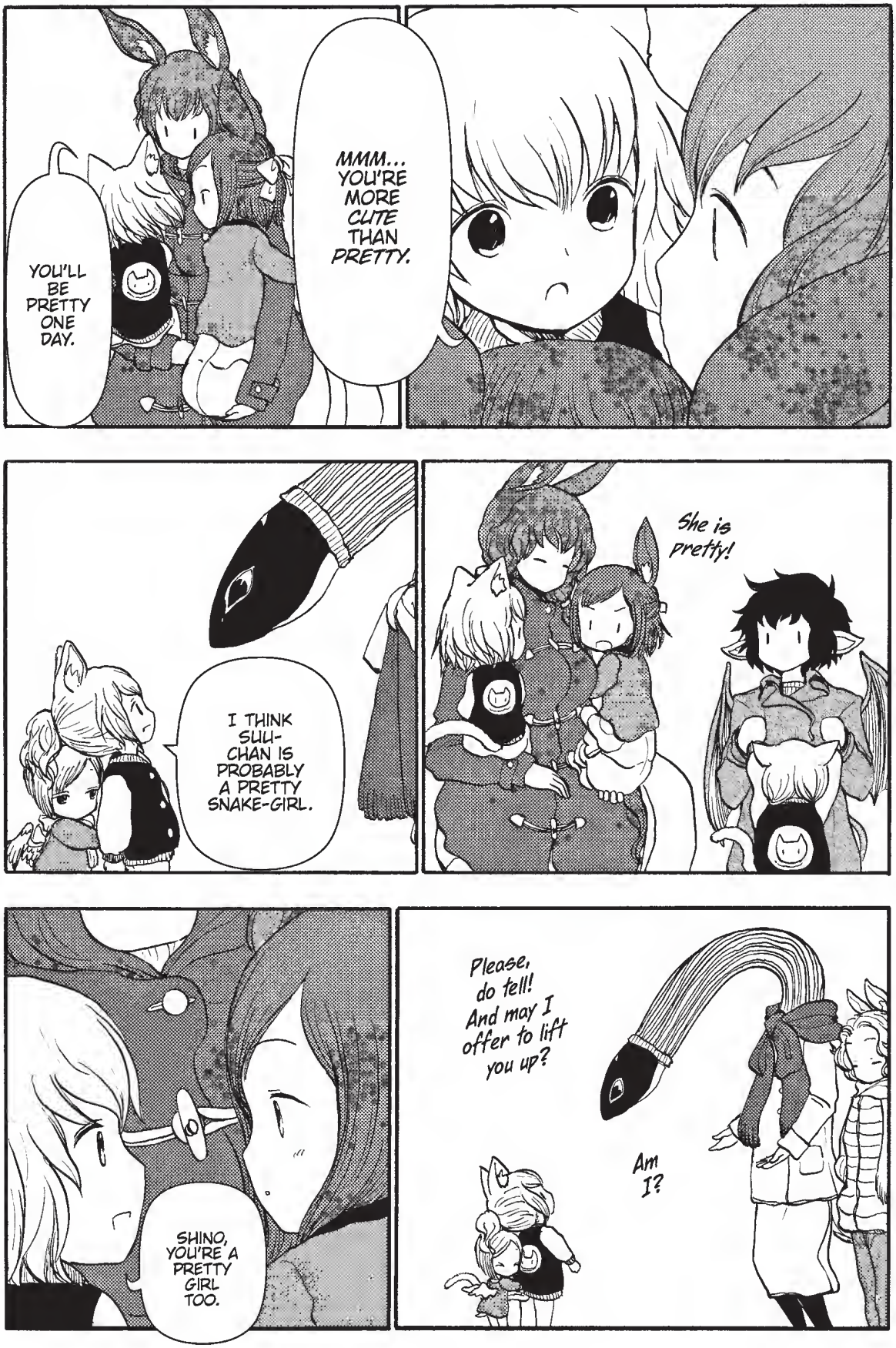

Hup.
Whatcha doin'?
Sakura Kindergarten
TOPPLE
WOBBLE
OH NO!


ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
TUMBLE
TMP
Wow!
CLAP
CLAP
YOU GIRLS NEED TO BE MORE CAREFUL!
SMOOSH
RYUUKO-SENSEI, YOU'RE A PRETTY LADY.

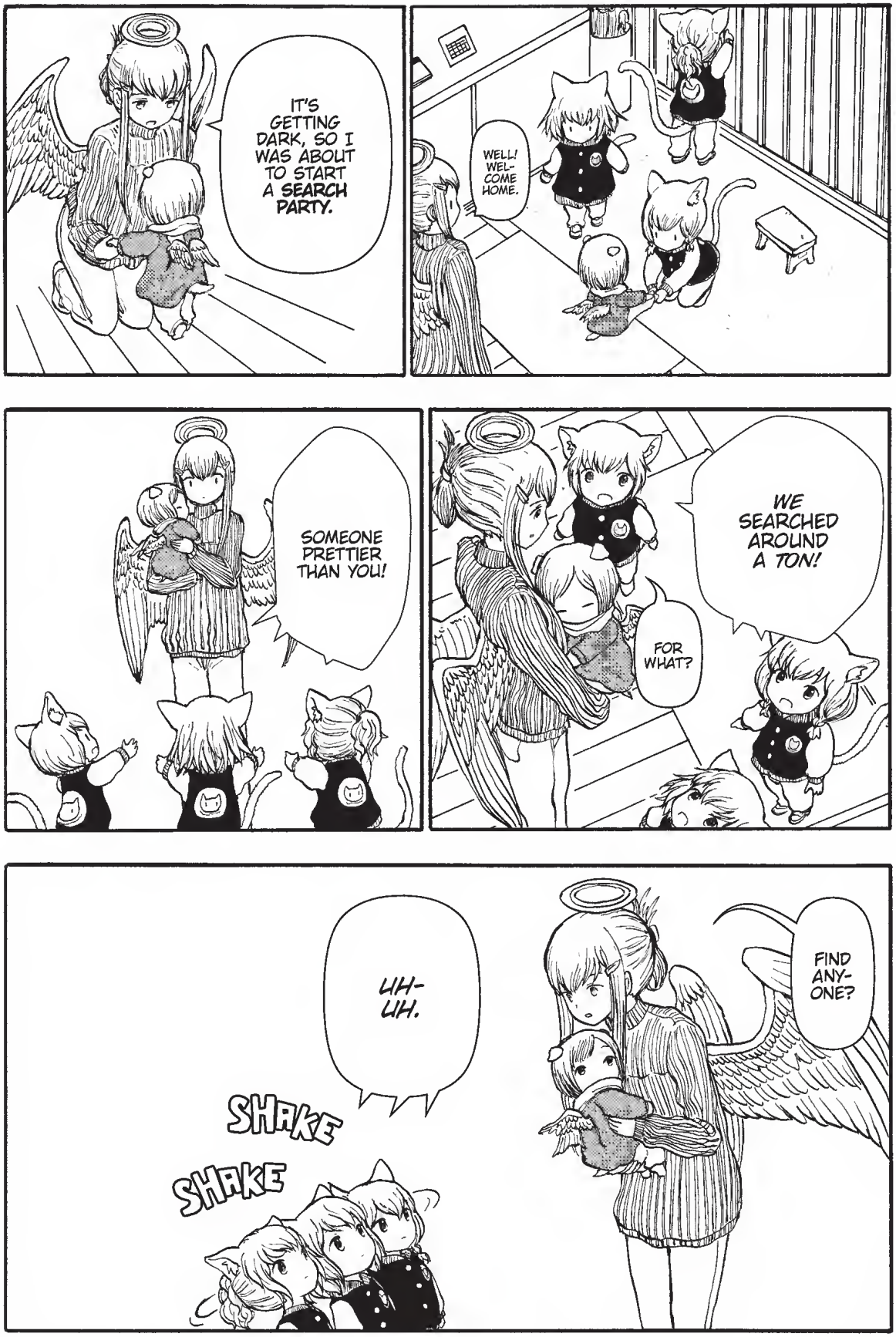

Hmm...
ARE YOU TRYING TO DISTRACT ME WITH FLATTERY?
AH. I SHOULD HAVE SEEN THAT COMING.
BUT MY BIG SISTER'S STILL PRETTIER.
Chi-chans, let's play over here!
THERE'S NO WAY I CAN COMPETE AGAINST A PRETTY TEENAGE GIRL WHO HAPPENS TO BE THEIR MOTHER FIGURE.
I WOULD NEVER!
Close one!
DON'T BE MAD.

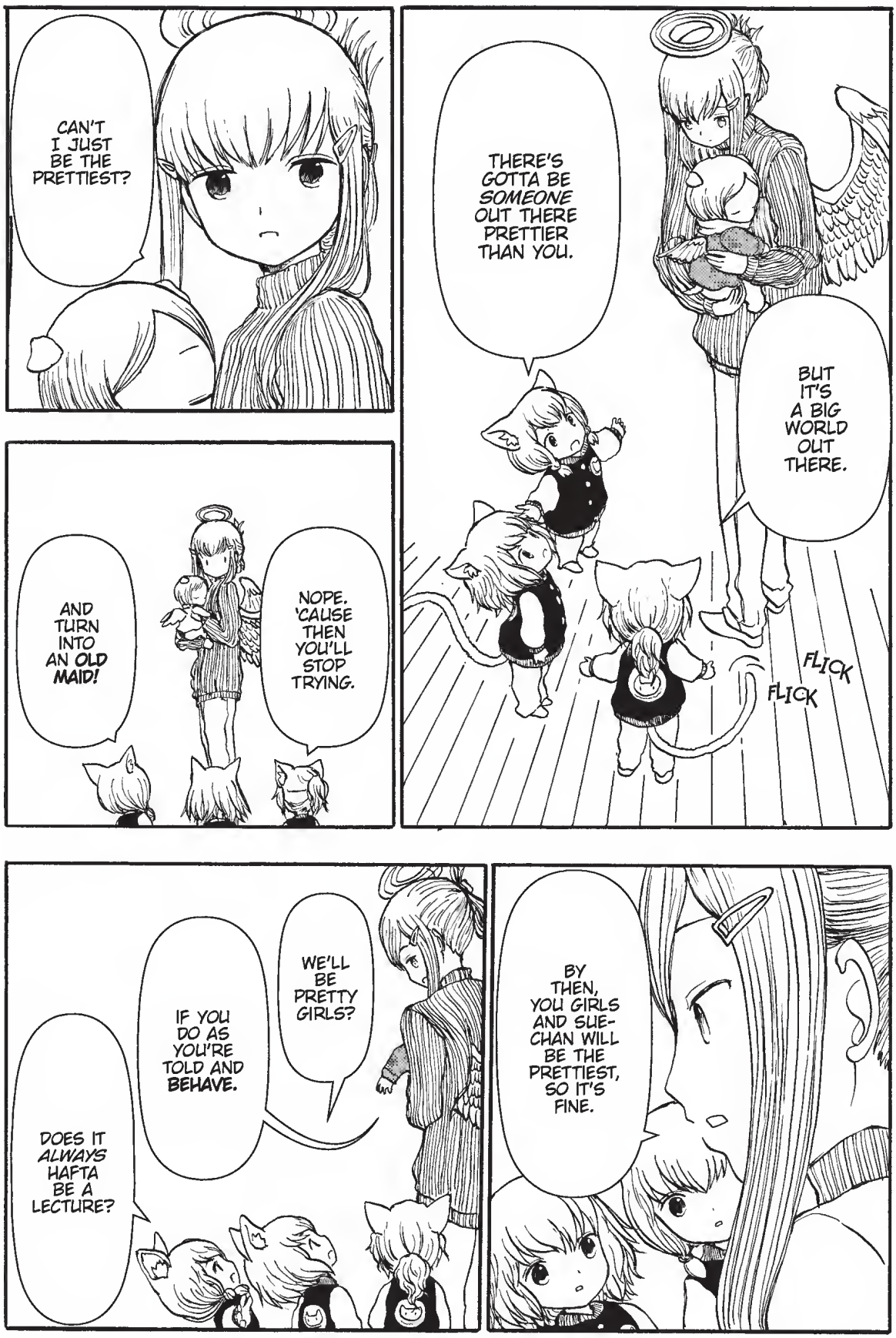

Nyah! Nyah! Nyah!
Wha?
NO PRETTY LADIES AROUND HERE.
SHINO-CHAN AND THE BIG GIRLS!
Oh hey, it's the munchkins from the class prez's place.

LIFT ME UP!
CHI-CHAN, YOU'RE SO DEMAND-ING!
AHH! ME TOO, ME TOO!
Yeee-hee hee!
STARE
Okay, okay.
Hup!


MMM... YOU'RE MORE CUTE THAN PRETTY.
YOU'LL BE PRETTY ONE DAY.
She is pretty!
I THINK SUU-CHAN IS PROBABLY A PRETTY SNAKE-GIRL.
Please, do tell! And may I offer to lift you up?
Am I?
SHINO, YOU'RE A PRETTY GIRL TOO.

NOD NOD
OHH, SO YOU'RE LOOKING FOR PRETTY GIRLS?
BUT MAYBE STILL KIND OF A KID.
Well, so are you!
WELL, WHAT ABOUT HER, THEN?
Eee!
YOU'RE A GIRL?
I thought you were a boy...
Keep going!
HEY! DON'T YOU REMEMBER WHEN WE ALL WENT TO THE POOL TOGETHER?


IT'S GETTING DARK, SO I WAS ABOUT TO START A SEARCH PARTY.
WELL! WEL-COME HOME.
SOMEONE PRETTIER THAN YOU!
WE SEARCHED AROUND A TON!
FOR WHAT?
FIND ANY-ONE?
UH-UH.
SHAKE
SHAKE


CAN'T I JUST BE THE PRETTIEST?
THERE'S GOTTA BE SOMEONE OUT THERE PRETTIER THAN YOU.
BUT IT'S A BIG WORLD OUT THERE.
FLICK
FLICK
NOPE. 'CAUSE THEN YOU'LL STOP TRYING.
AND TURN INTO AN OLD MAID!
BY THEN, YOU GIRLS AND SUE-CHAN WILL BE THE PRETTIEST, SO IT'S FINE.
WE'LL BE PRETTY GIRLS?
IF YOU DO AS YOU'RE TOLD AND BEHAVE.
DOES IT ALWAYS HAFTA BE A LECTURE?

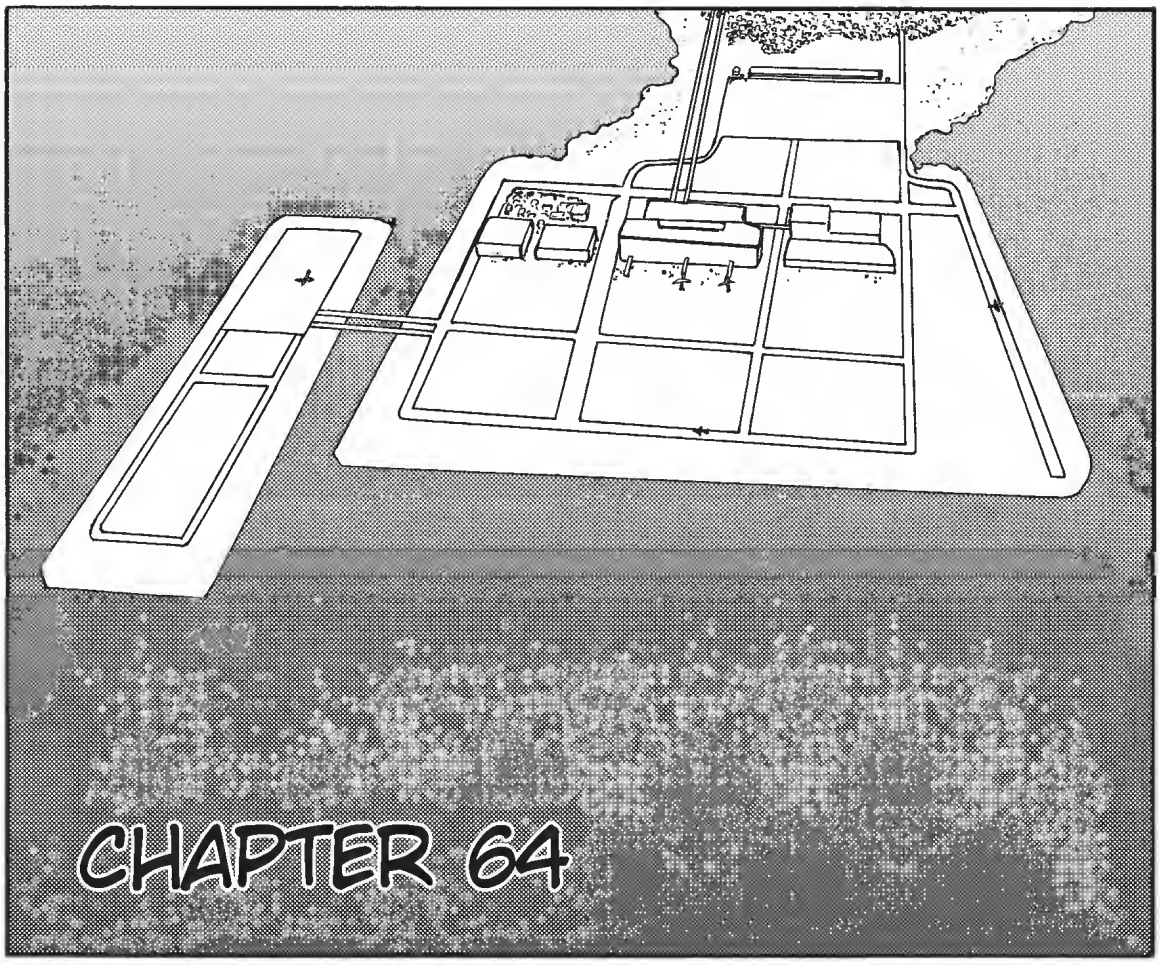
A CentaUr's Life

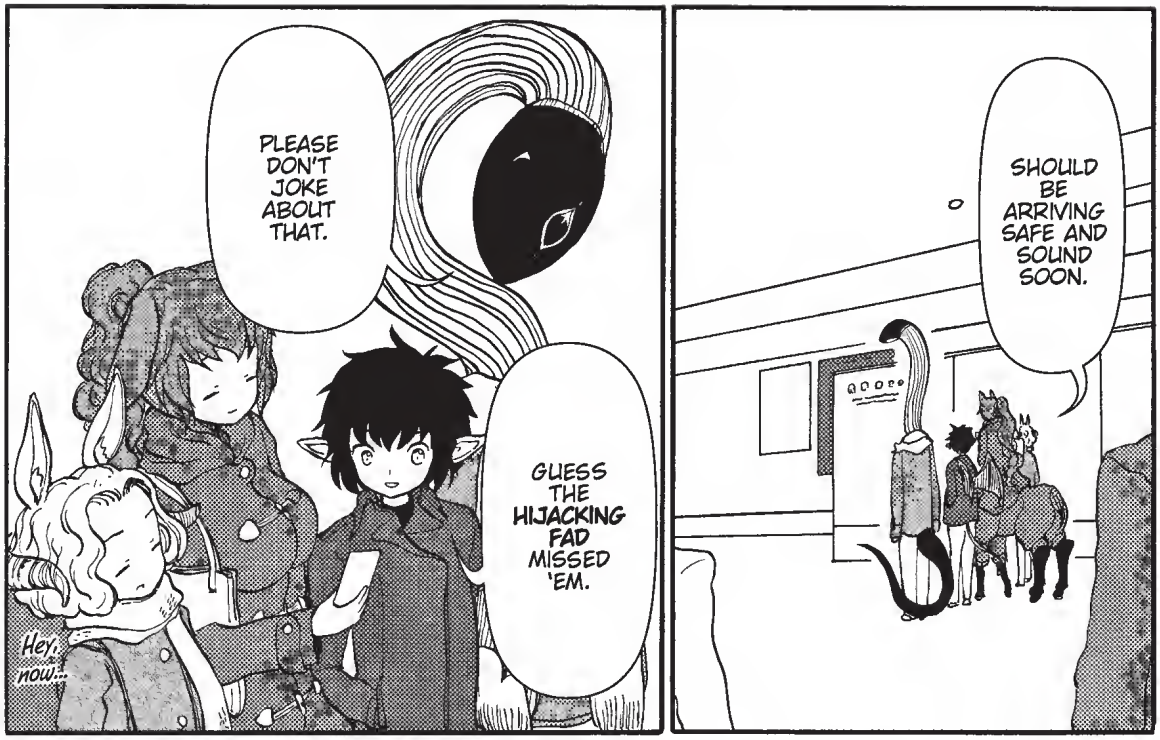
JAPANESE *YOKAI*
ONI

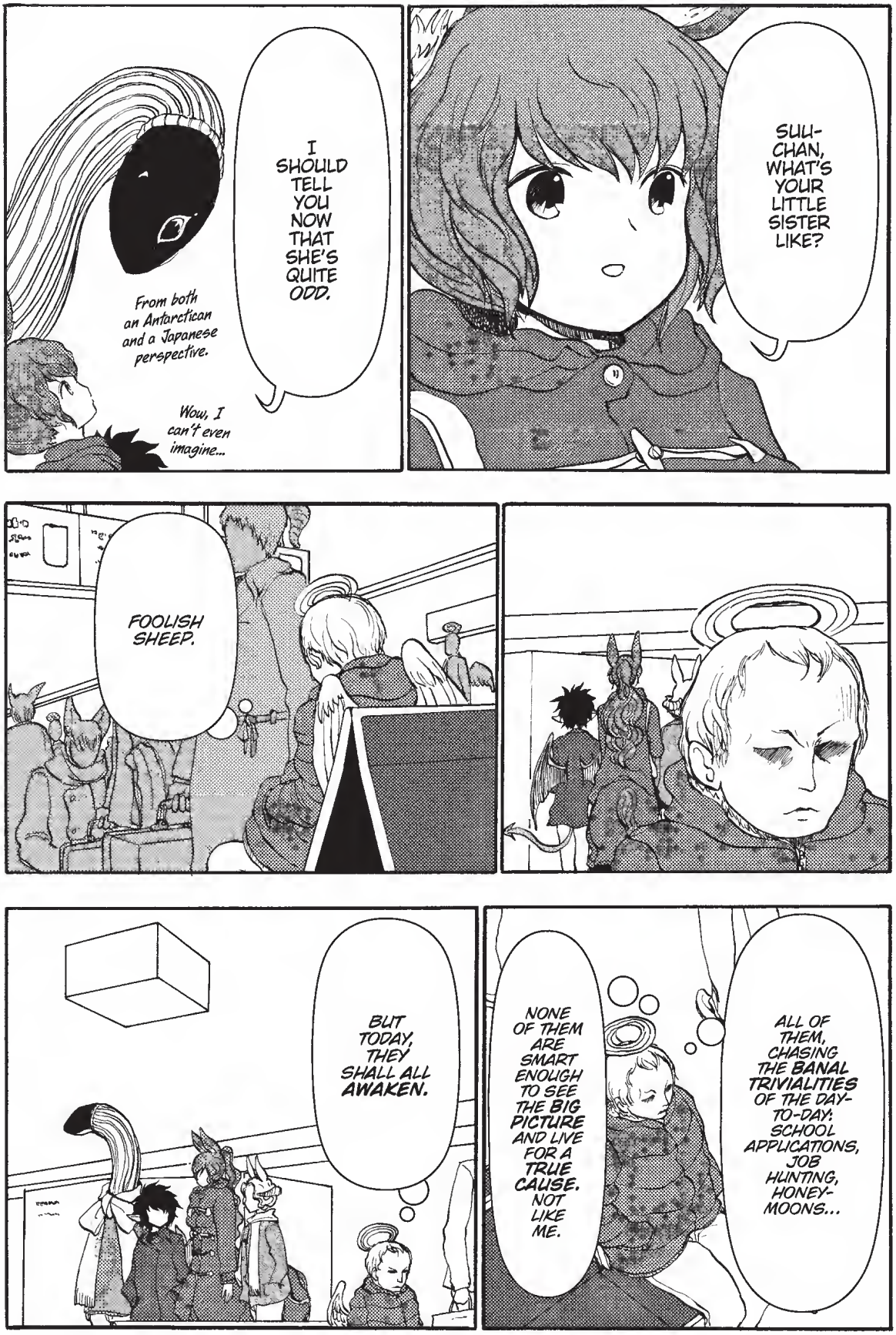
ON THE MAINLAND, THE CHARACTER FOR "ONI" REFERS TO SPIRITS OF THE DEAD. IN JAPAN, THE WORD CAME TO SIGNIFY THE UNSEEN ENTITIES THOUGHT TO BE THE CAUSE OF ALL ADVERSITY. IN THE OLDEN DAYS, IT WAS BELIEVED THAT THE POLLUTION AND DEATH DUMPED INTO WATERWAYS BY THE POPULACE WOULD TRAVEL BACK INTO THE CAPITAL AND BRING ABOUT DISASTER AND MISFORTUNE. THE FAMOUS "ONI OF MOUNT OOE" IS BELIEVED TO HAVE STEMMED FROM AN EPIDEMIC THAT ONCE PLAGUED THE CAPITAL, WHICH PEOPLE PERCEIVED AS AN ONI NEAR THE CITY THAT WAS TAKING PEOPLE AWAY.

AS WITH OTHER *YOKAI*, ONI WERE ORIGINALLY UNSEEN ENTITIES, BUT OVER TIME WERE ACCEPTED AS ACTUAL PHYSICAL BEINGS AFTER BEING GIVEN FORM BY ARTISTS... IN THE CASE OF ONI, THE FORM OF AN ENORMOUS, BARBARIC, AND FEARSOME MAN. ONE THEORY SUGGESTS THAT THE PHYSICAL MODELS FOR ONI WERE FOREIGN PEOPLE (LIKELY EUROPEAN) THAT WASHED ASHORE, BUT IT'S MORE LIKELY THAT THE ONI'S APPEARANCE WAS ESTABLISHED FIRST AND SIMPLY LIKENED TO THOSE UNFAMILIAR FEATURES LATER.

ONI ARE OFTEN DEPICTED ADORNED IN TIGER PELTS BECAUSE THEY ARE SAID TO EMERGE VIA THE "DEMON'S GATE" LOCATED TO THE NORTHEAST, THE DIRECTION ASSOCIATED WITH THE TIGER IN THE CHINESE ZODIAC.

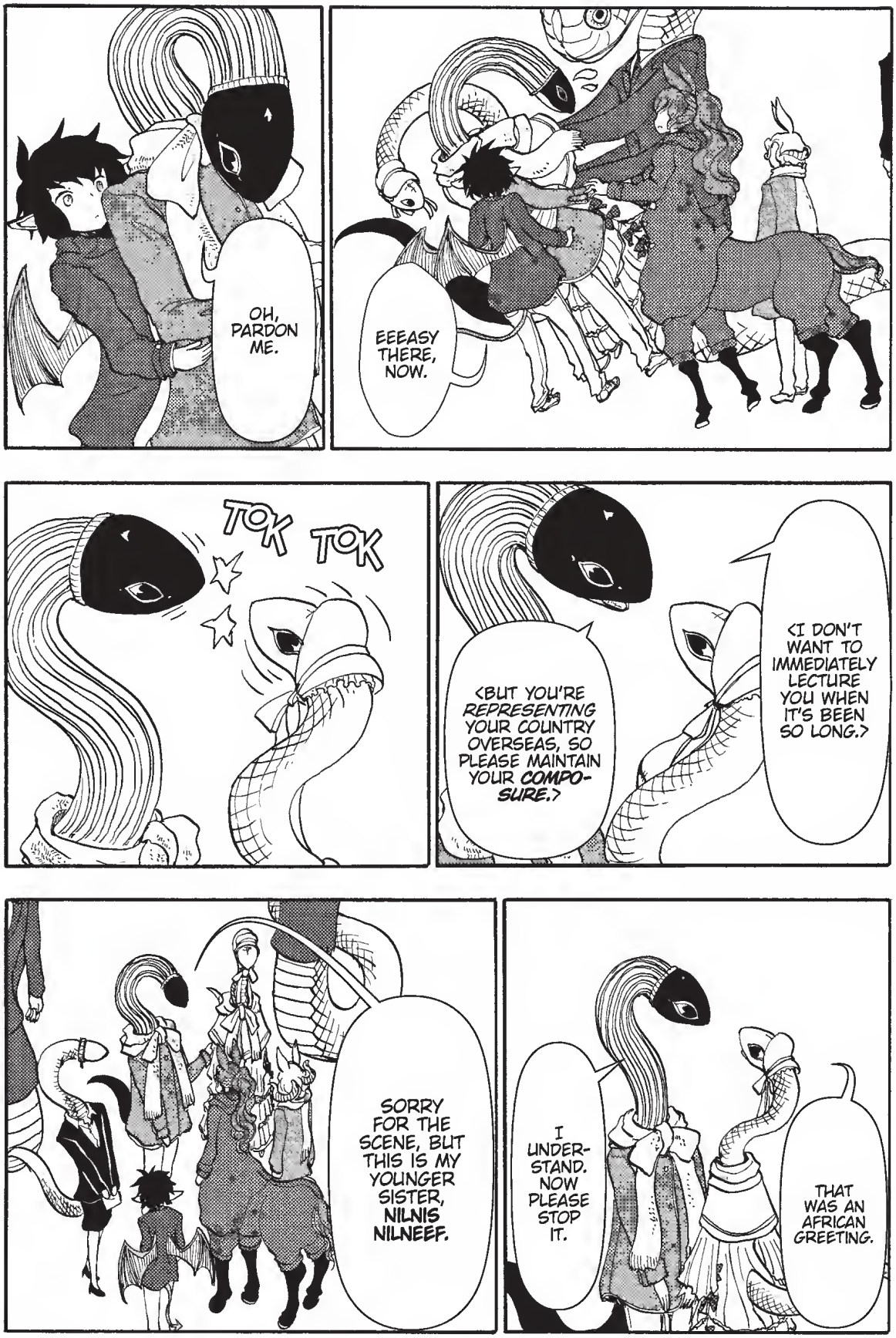

CHAPTER 64

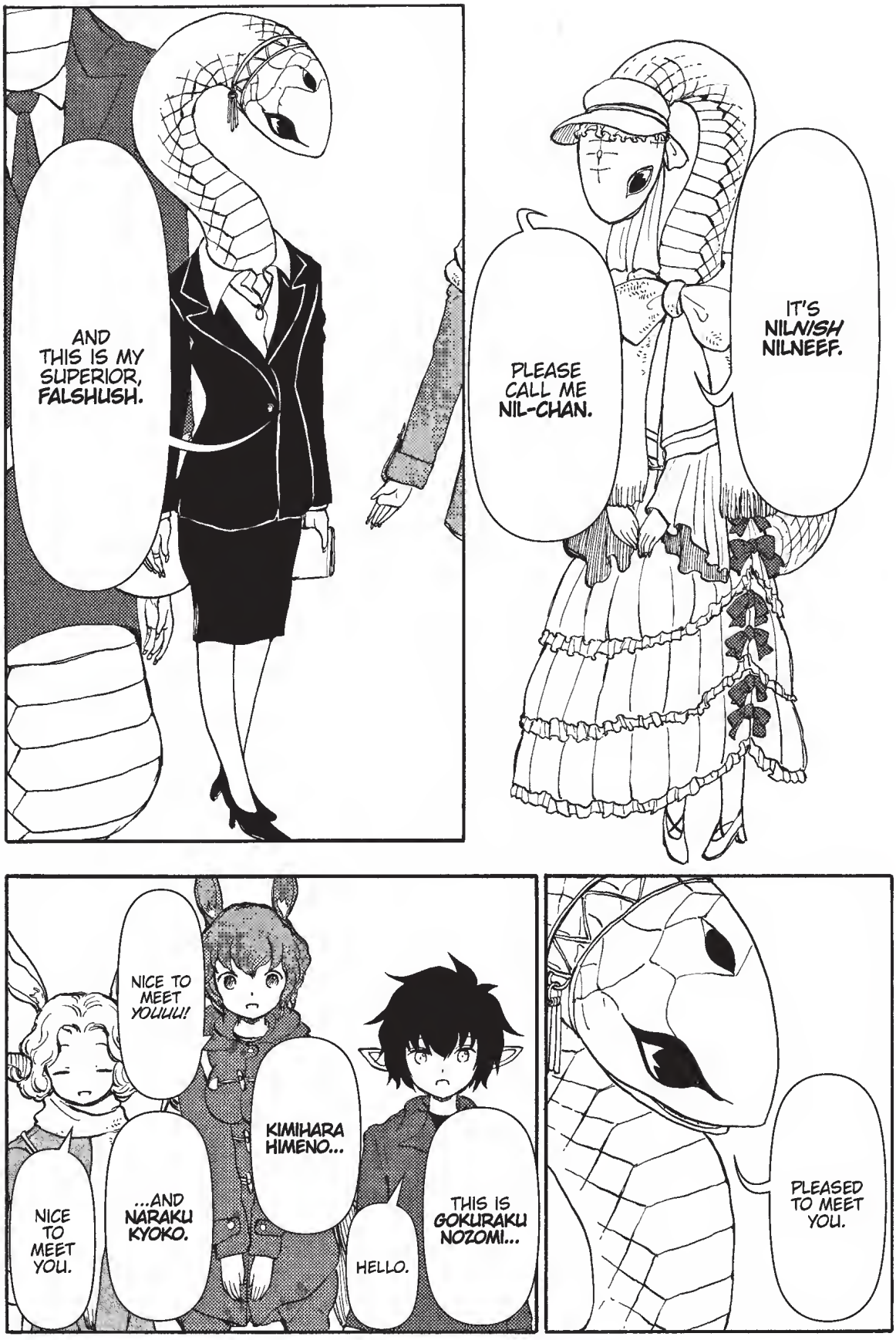

PLEASE DON'T JOKE ABOUT THAT.
GUESS THE HIJACKING FAD MISSED 'EM.
Hey, now...
SHOULD BE ARRIVING SAFE AND SOUND SOON.


SUU-CHAN, WHAT'S YOUR LITTLE SISTER LIKE?
I SHOULD TELL YOU NOW THAT SHE'S QUITE ODD.
From both an Antarctican and a Japanese perspective.
Wow, I can't even imagine...
FOOLISH SHEEP.
ALL OF THEM, CHASING THE BANAL TRIVIALITIES OF THE DAY-TO-DAY: SCHOOL APPLICATIONS, JOB HUNTING, HONEY-MOONS...
NONE OF THEM ARE SMART ENOUGH TO SEE THE BIG PICTURE AND LIVE FOR A TRUE CAUSE. NOT LIKE ME.
BUT TODAY, THEY SHALL ALL AWAKEN.

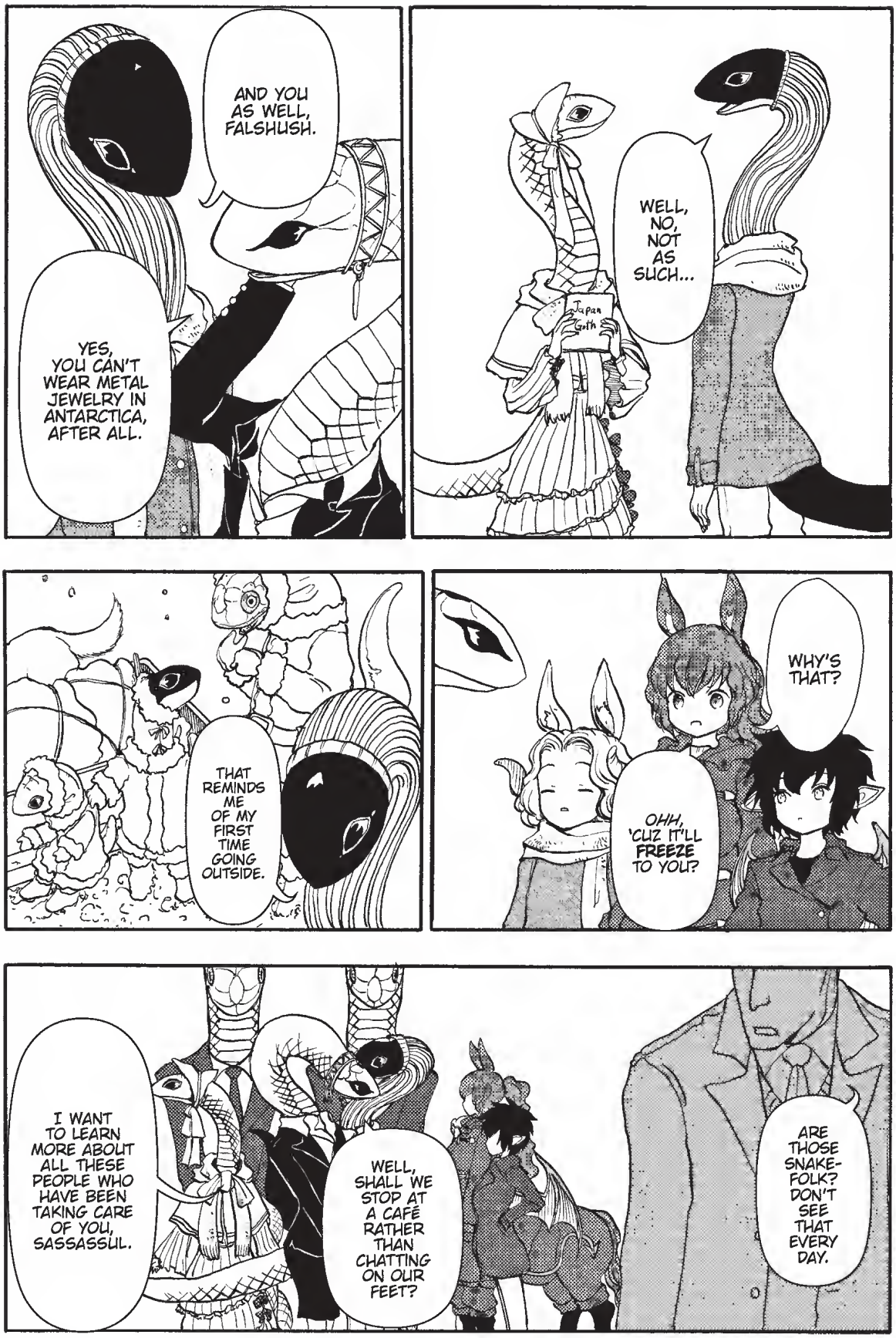
TARGET IS HEADED TOWARD THE ARRIVALS LOBBY.
UNDER-STOOD. WE'LL TAKE IT FROM HERE.
--IS JUST THE KIND OF TERRORIST THAT MIGHT BE PRESENT, BUT OUR DUTY ENDS HERE. WE'RE PASSING IT OVER TO YOU.
Arrivals
!
OH, THERE SHE IS. THAT'S HER, RIGHT?
PRETTY OBVIOUS, EVEN FROM A DISTANCE.
Um... is that cosplay?
SISTER!
TMP
TMP
TMP

WHUMP
GLOMP
Whoa.

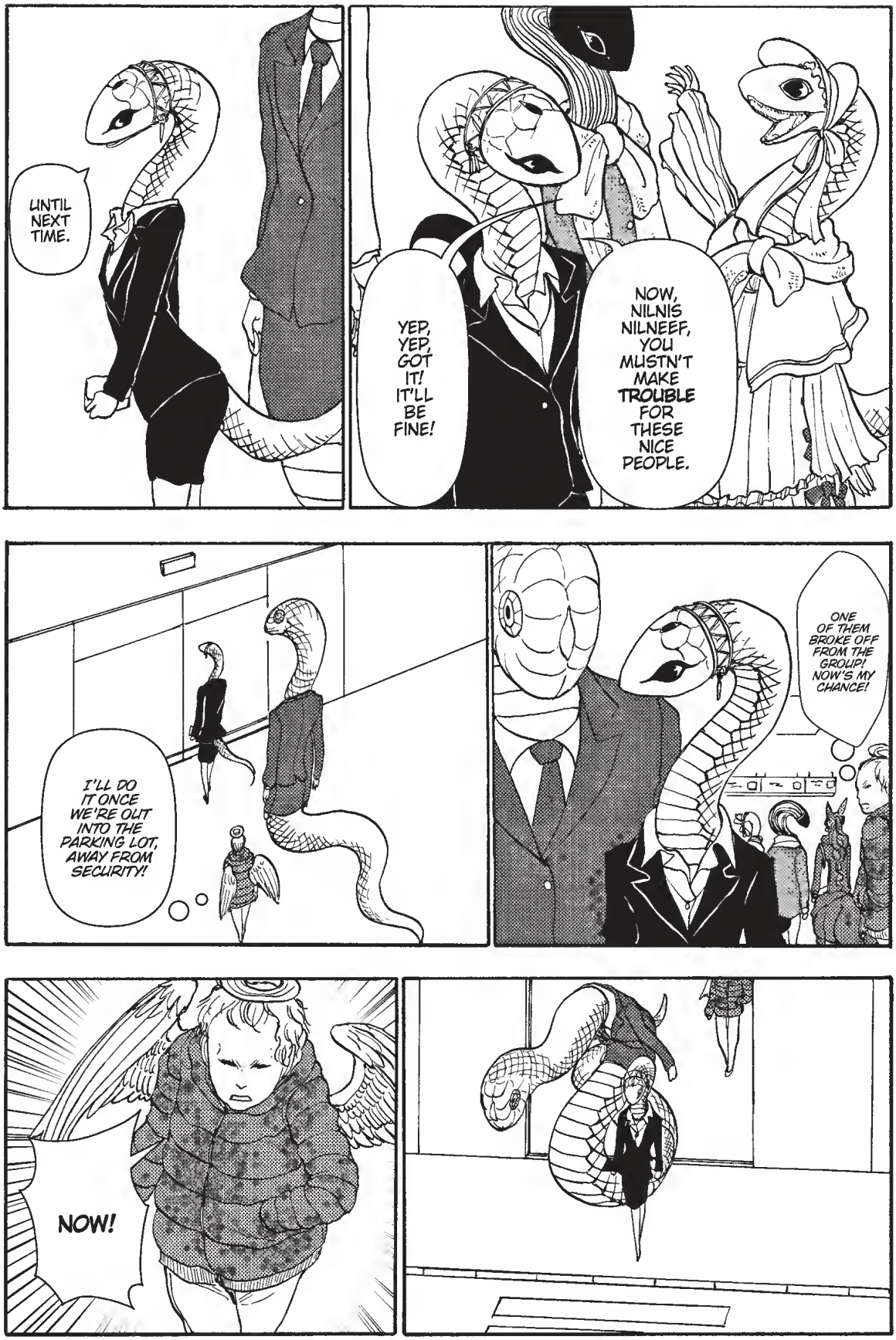

OH, PARDON ME.
EEEASY THERE, NOW.
TOK TOK
<I DON'T WANT TO IMMEDIATELY LECTURE YOU WHEN IT'S BEEN SO LONG.>
<BUT YOU'RE *REPRESENTING* YOUR COUNTRY OVERSEAS, SO PLEASE MAINTAIN YOUR ***COMPOSURE.***>
SORRY FOR THE SCENE, BUT THIS IS MY YOUNGER SISTER, **NILNIS NILNEEF.**
I UNDERSTAND. NOW PLEASE STOP IT.
THAT WAS AN AFRICAN GREETING.

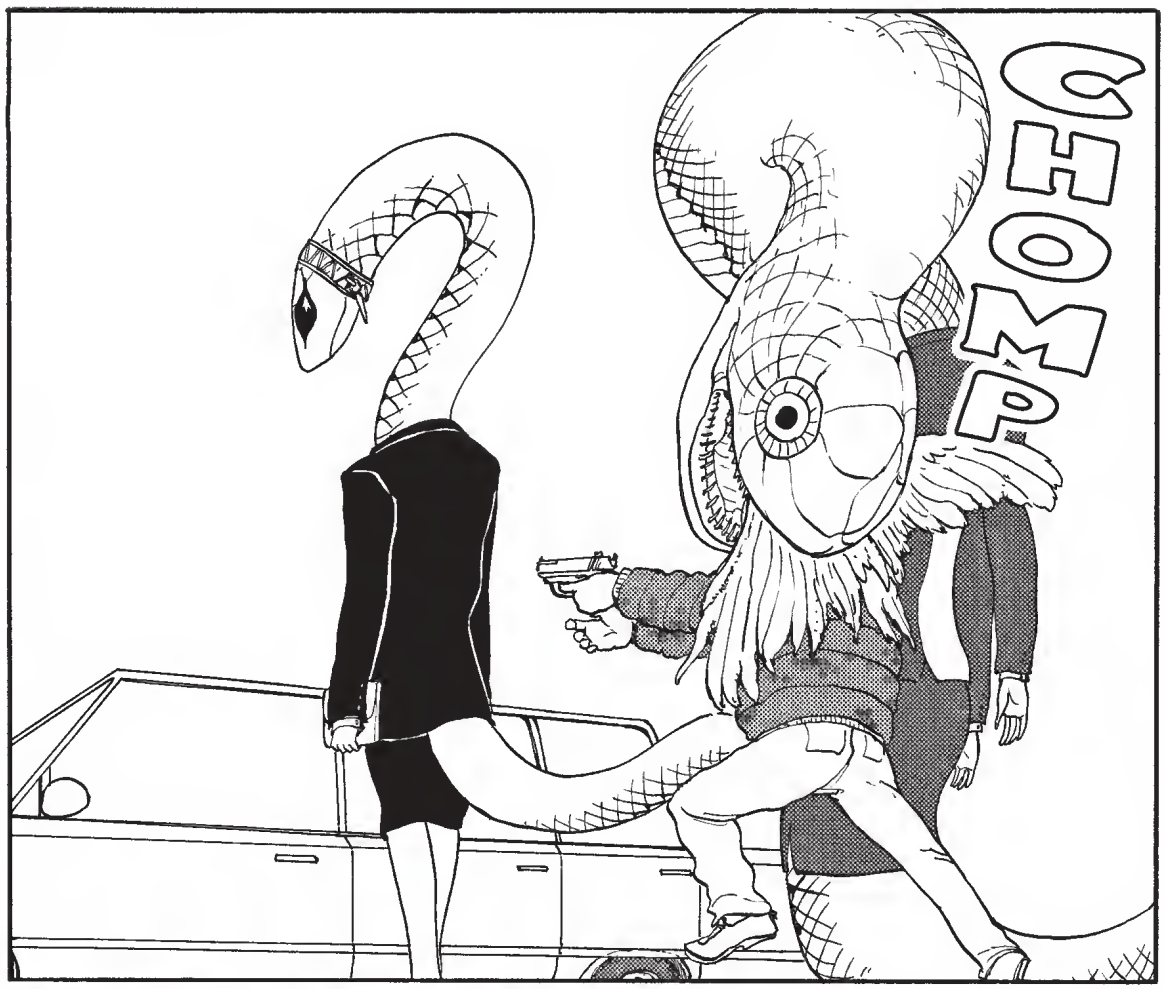

AND THIS IS MY SUPERIOR, FALSHUSH.
IT'S NILNISH NILNEEF.
PLEASE CALL ME NIL-CHAN.
NICE TO MEET YOUUU!
KIMIHARA HIMENO...
...AND NARAKU KYOKO.
NICE TO MEET YOU.
HELLO.
THIS IS GOKURAKU NOZOMI...
PLEASED TO MEET YOU.

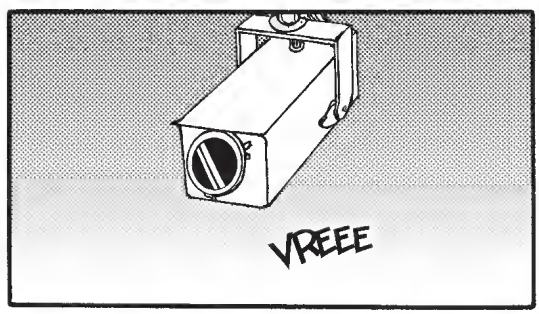
...AND... THIS IS...?
FURROW
BY THE WAY, SHE CALLS ME HER "SUPERIOR," BUT I'M NOT REALLY IN A HIGHER POSITION. YOU COULD SAY I'M SORT OF A **CLASS PRESIDENT.**
YOU MUST BE SASSASSUL'S SCHOOL FRIENDS. I'VE HEARD MUCH ABOUT YOU.
YOU CERTAINLY SEEM TO HAVE WARMED UP TO HUMAN SOCIETY.
OH, DON'T MIND THEM AT ALL.
YES, JUST THINK OF THEM AS A SORT OF **GUARD ROBOT.**
THOUGH, THEY *DO* HAVE PERSON-ALITIES.
WELL, THIS KIND OF STUFF IS POPULAR IN THIS COUNTRY, RIGHT?

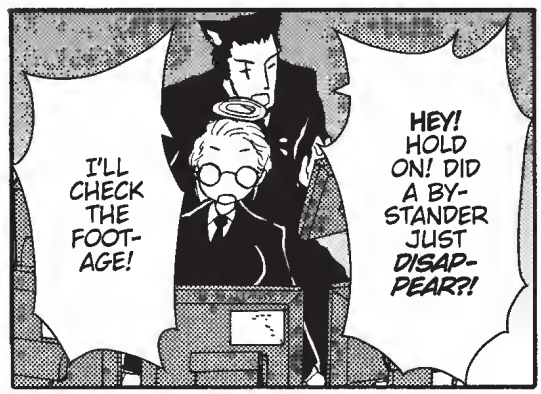

AND YOU AS WELL, FALSHUSH.
YES, YOU CAN'T WEAR METAL JEWELRY IN ANTARCTICA, AFTER ALL.
WELL, NO, NOT AS SUCH...
Japan Goth
THAT REMINDS ME OF MY FIRST TIME GOING OUTSIDE.
WHY'S THAT?
OHH, 'CUZ IT'LL FREEZE TO YOU?
I WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ALL THESE PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN TAKING CARE OF YOU, SASSASSIL.
WELL, SHALL WE STOP AT A CAFÉ RATHER THAN CHATTING ON OUR FEET?
ARE THOSE SNAKE-FOLK? DON'T SEE THAT EVERY DAY.

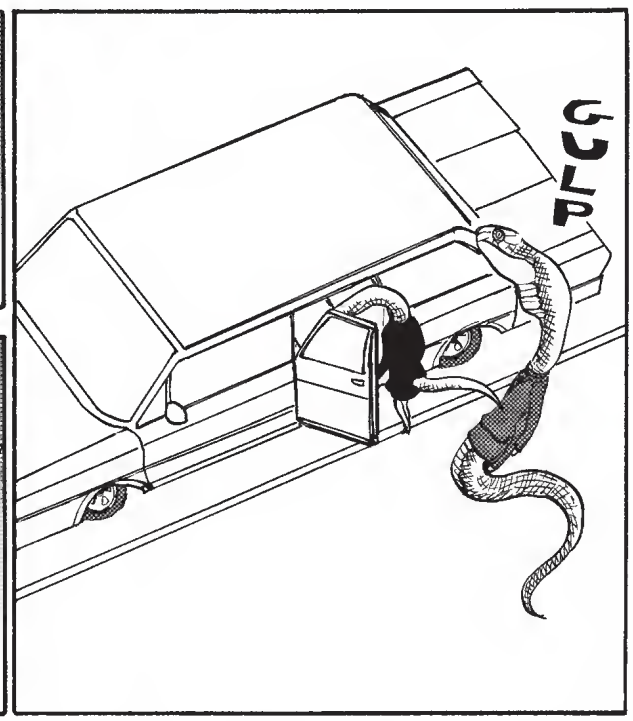
THIS GUY'S DEFINITELY AN UNDER-COVER AGENT.
THIS IS WHAT SEPARATES A FREEDOM FIGHTER FROM A MERE DOG.
MY COMRADES WILL SHOW ME THE BLIND SPOTS WITH NO CAMERAS OR GUARDS.
BUT THERE'S ALWAYS AN OPENING.
SECURITY'S TIGHT.
I WOULD HAVE LIKED TO TREAT YOU TO A MORE LAVISH MEAL, BUT I HAVE WORK TO ATTEND TO AFTER THIS, SO IT WILL HAVE TO BE ANOTHER TIME.
THANK YOU FOR TREATING US.

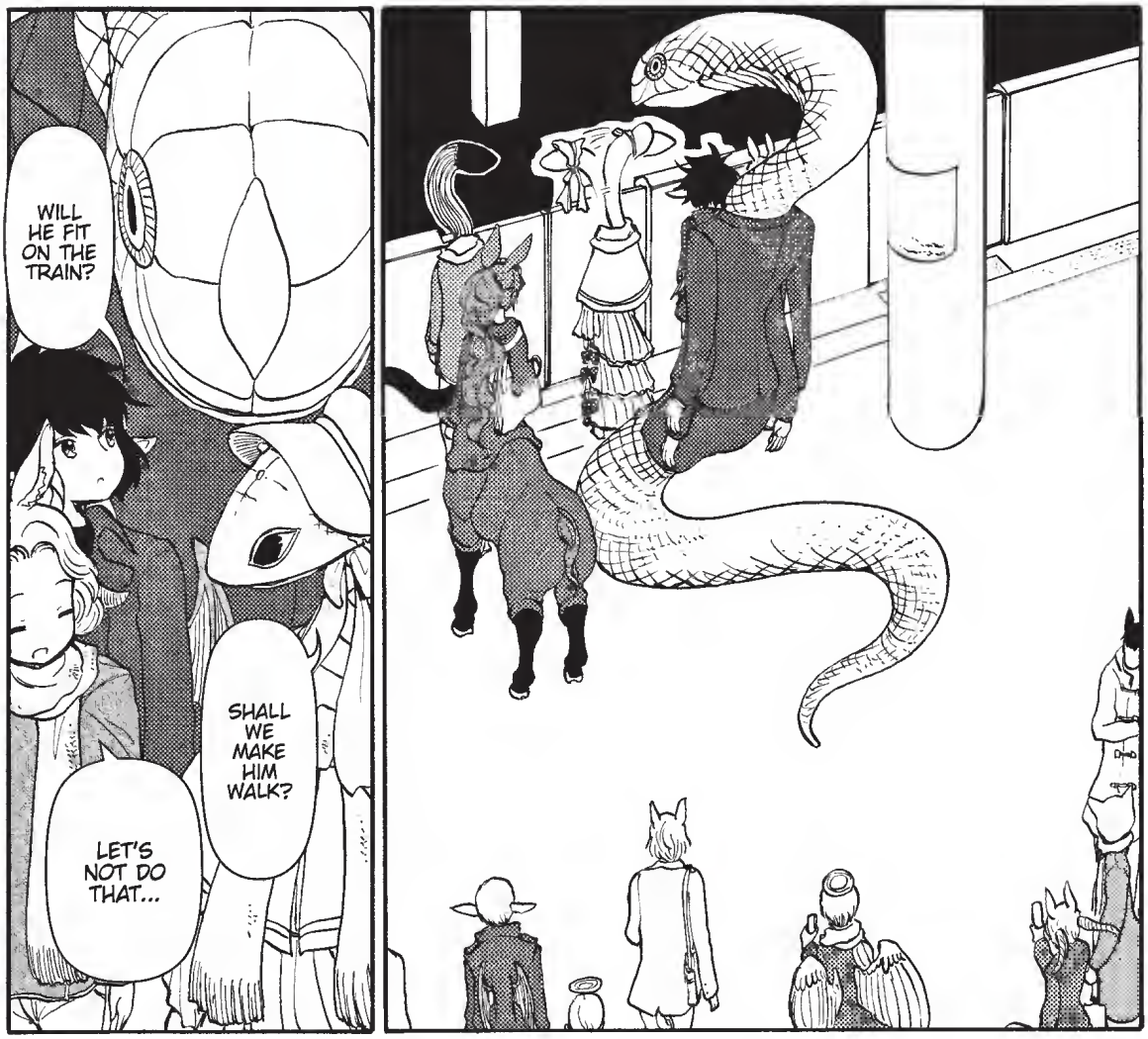

UNTIL NEXT TIME.
YEP, YEP, GOT IT! IT'LL BE FINE!
NOW, NILNIS NILNEEF, YOU MUSTN'T MAKE TROUBLE FOR THESE NICE PEOPLE.
I'LL DO IT ONCE WE'RE OUT INTO THE PARKING LOT, AWAY FROM SECURITY!
ONE OF THEM BROKE OFF FROM THE GROUP! NOW'S MY CHANCE!
NOW!

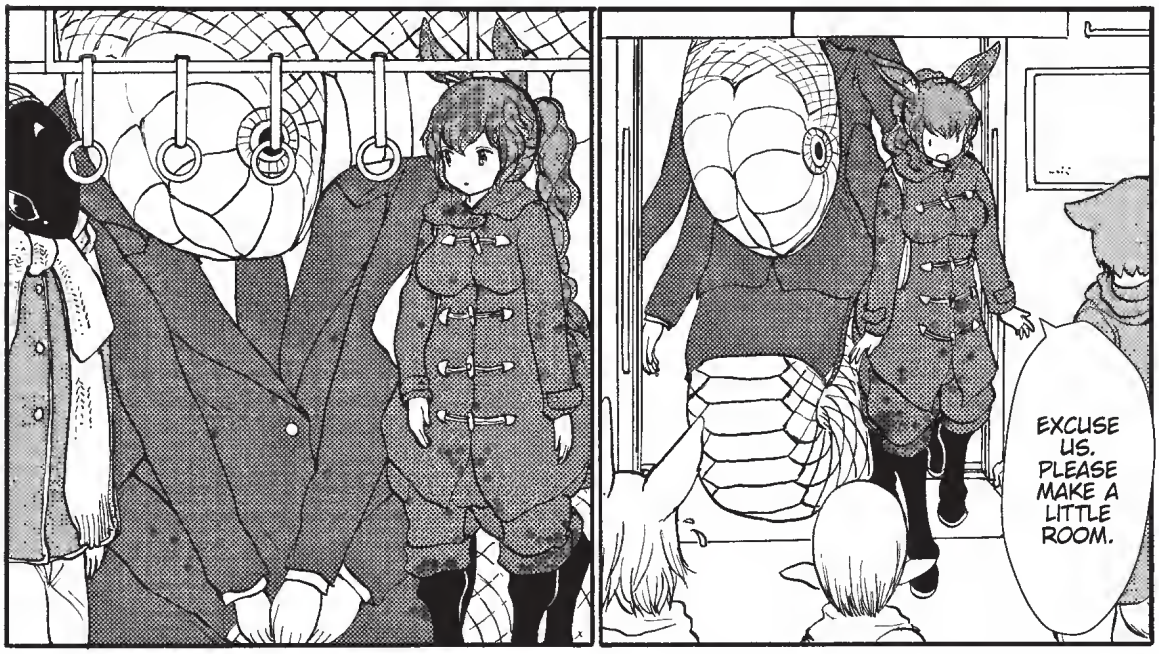

CHOMP

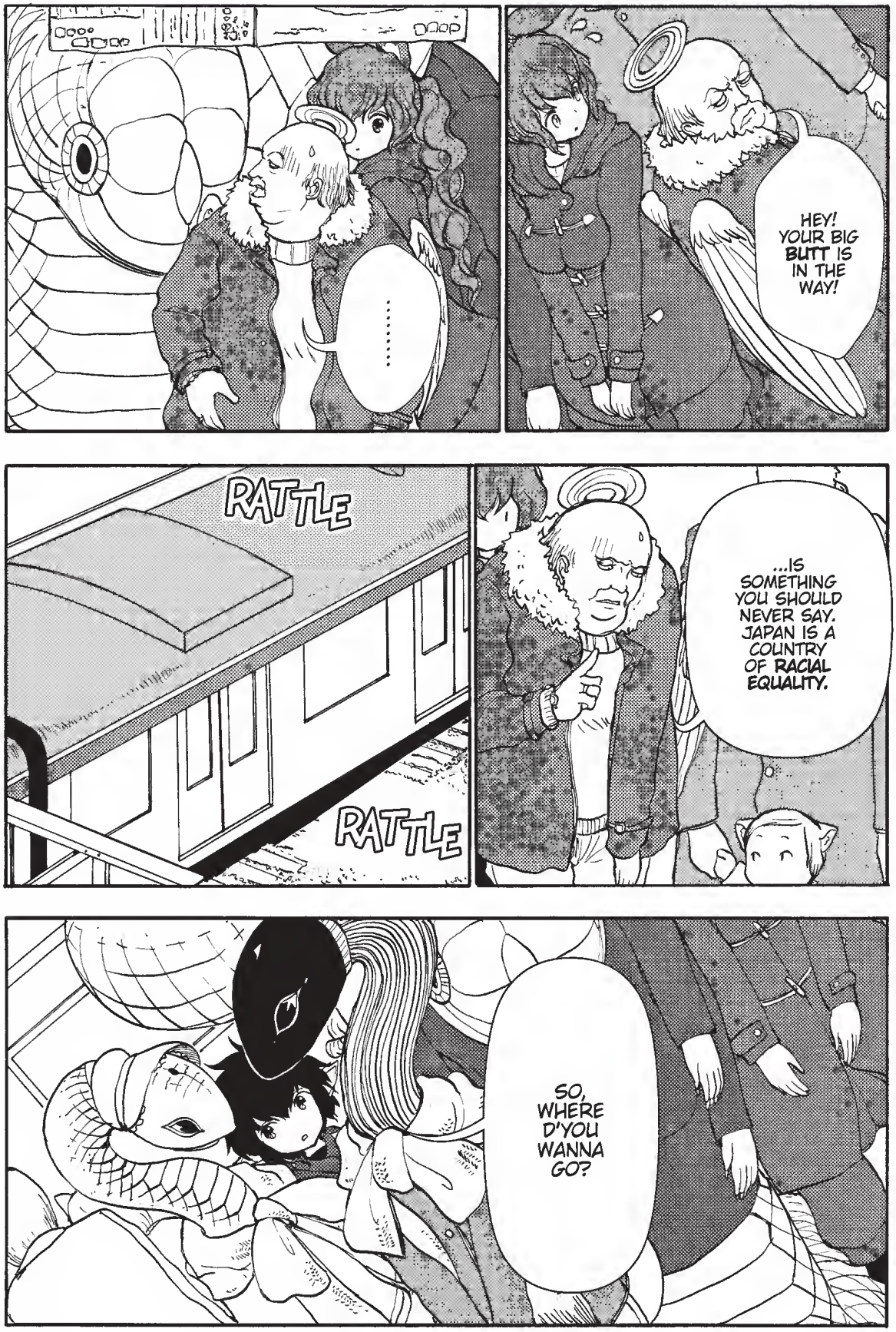

VREEE

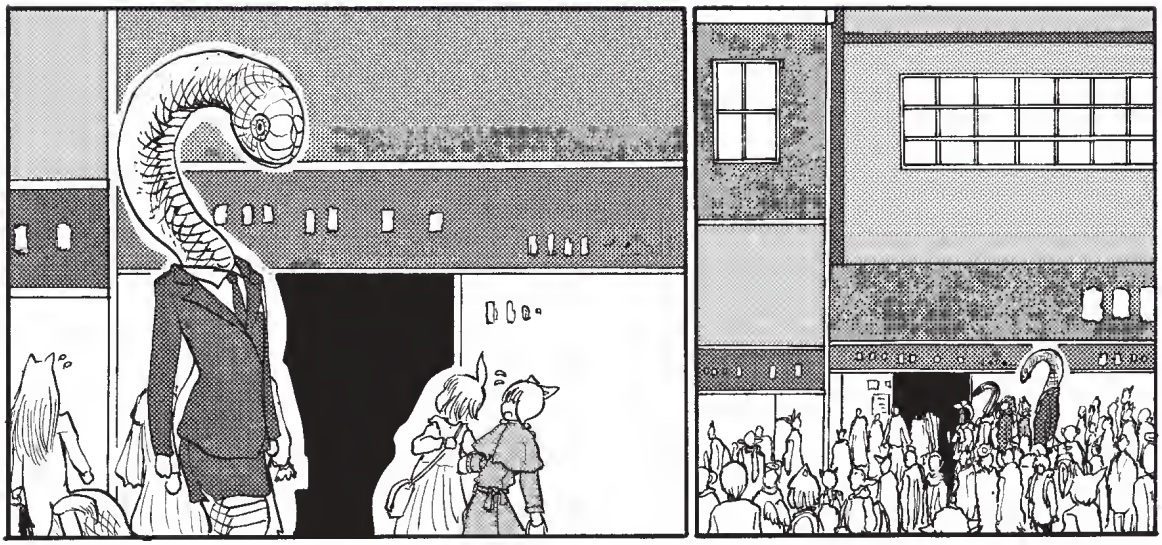

I'LL CHECK THE FOOT-AGE!
HEY! HOLD ON! DID A BY-STANDER JUST DISAP-PEAR?!

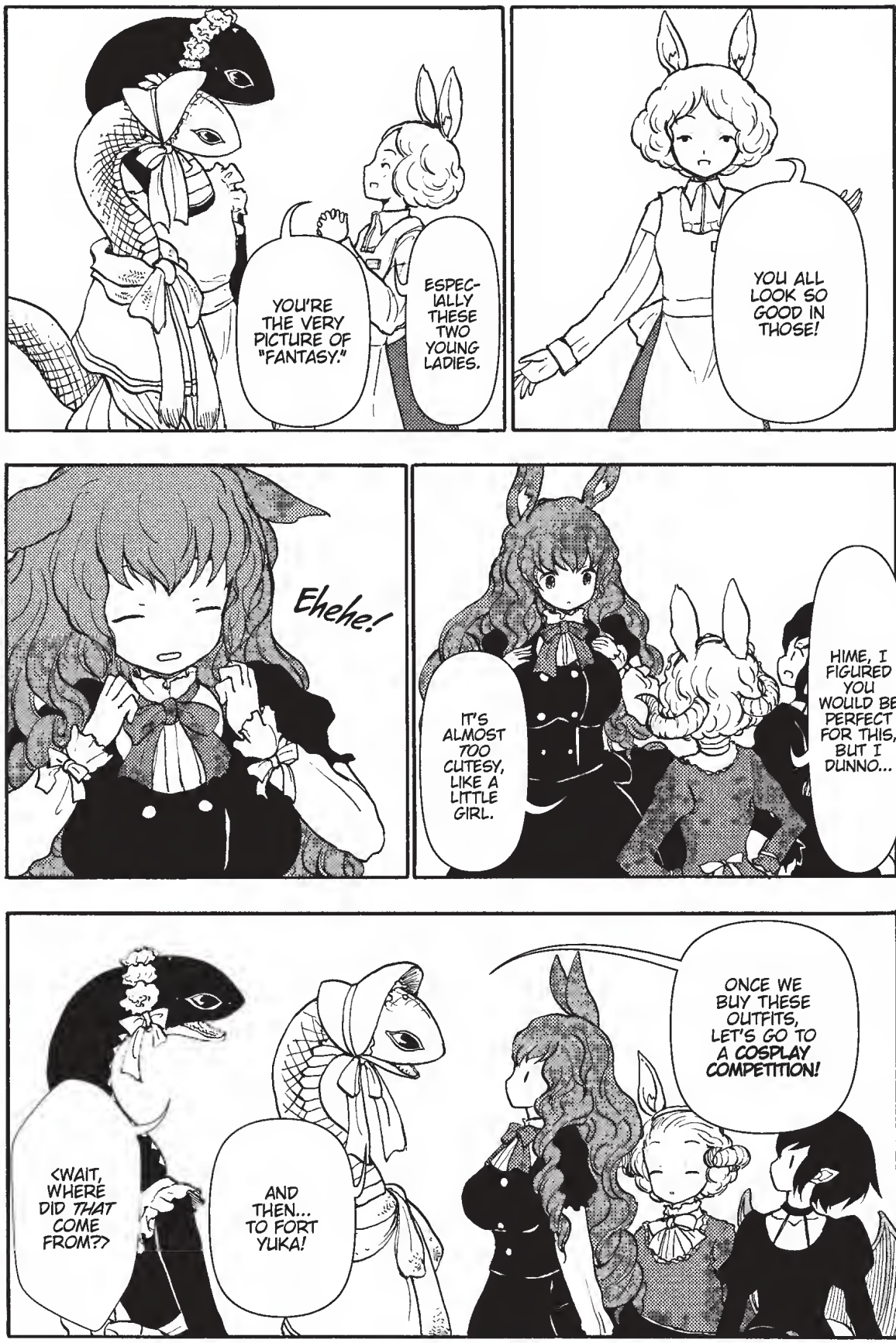

GULP

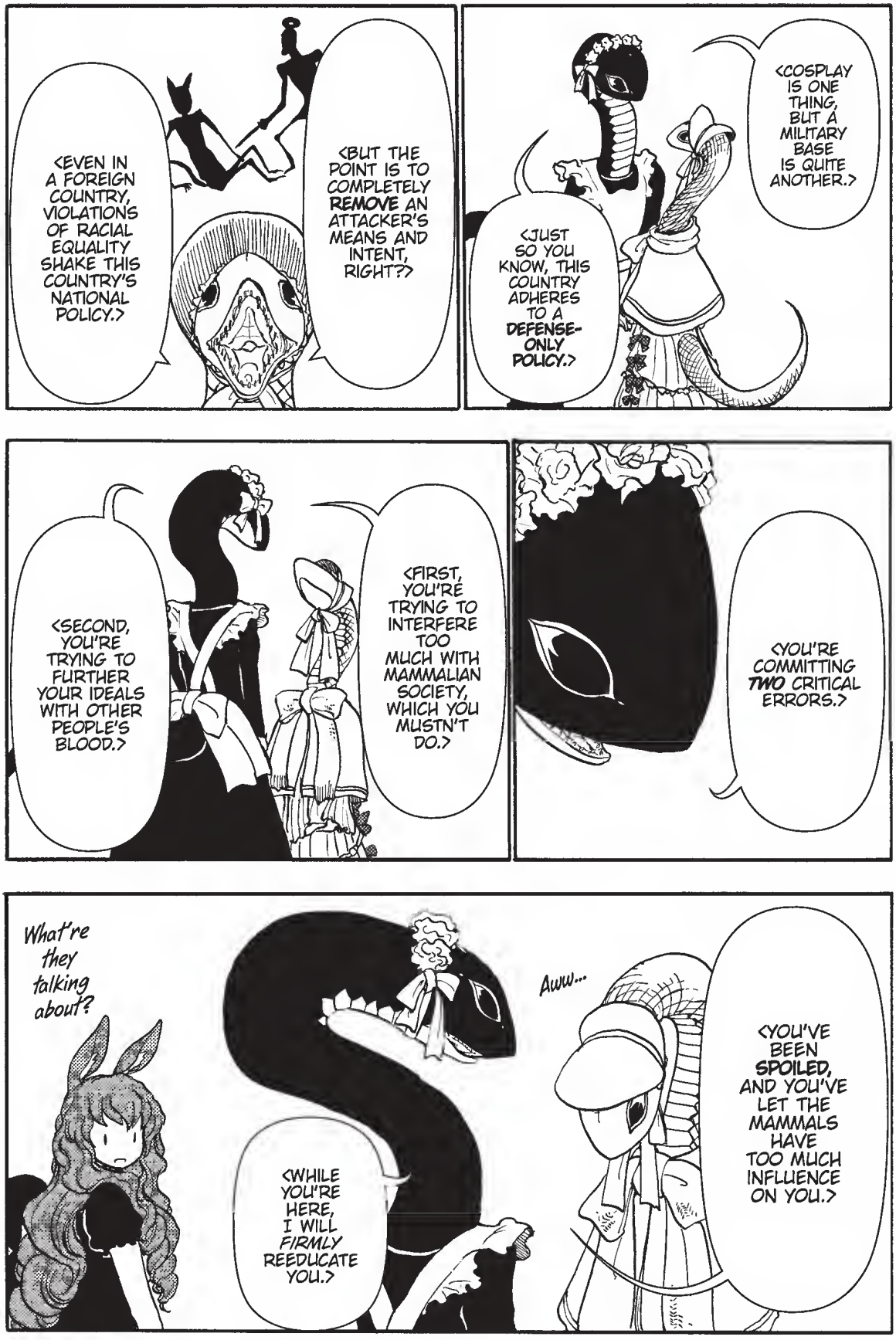

WILL HE FIT ON THE TRAIN?
SHALL WE MAKE HIM WALK?
LET'S NOT DO THAT...

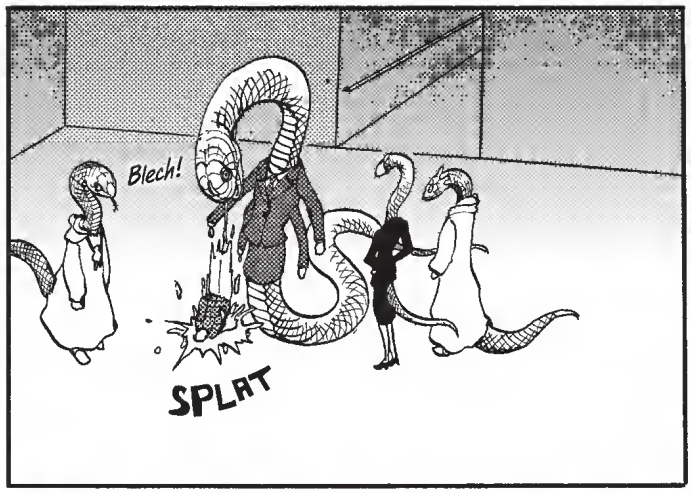

EXCUSE US. PLEASE MAKE A LITTLE ROOM.

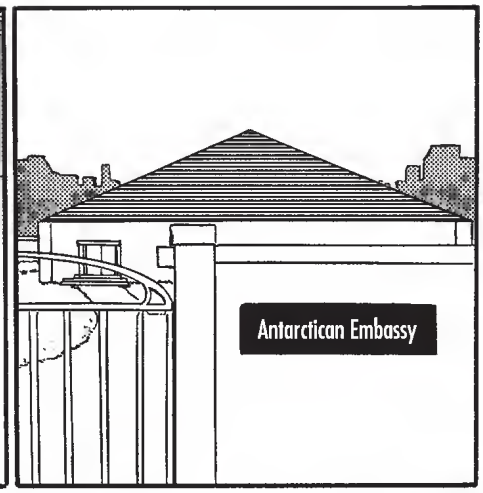

.....
HEY! YOUR BIG BUTT IS IN THE WAY!
RATTLE
RATTLE
...IS SOMETHING YOU SHOULD NEVER SAY. JAPAN IS A COUNTRY OF RACIAL EQUALITY.
SO, WHERE D'YOU WANNA GO?

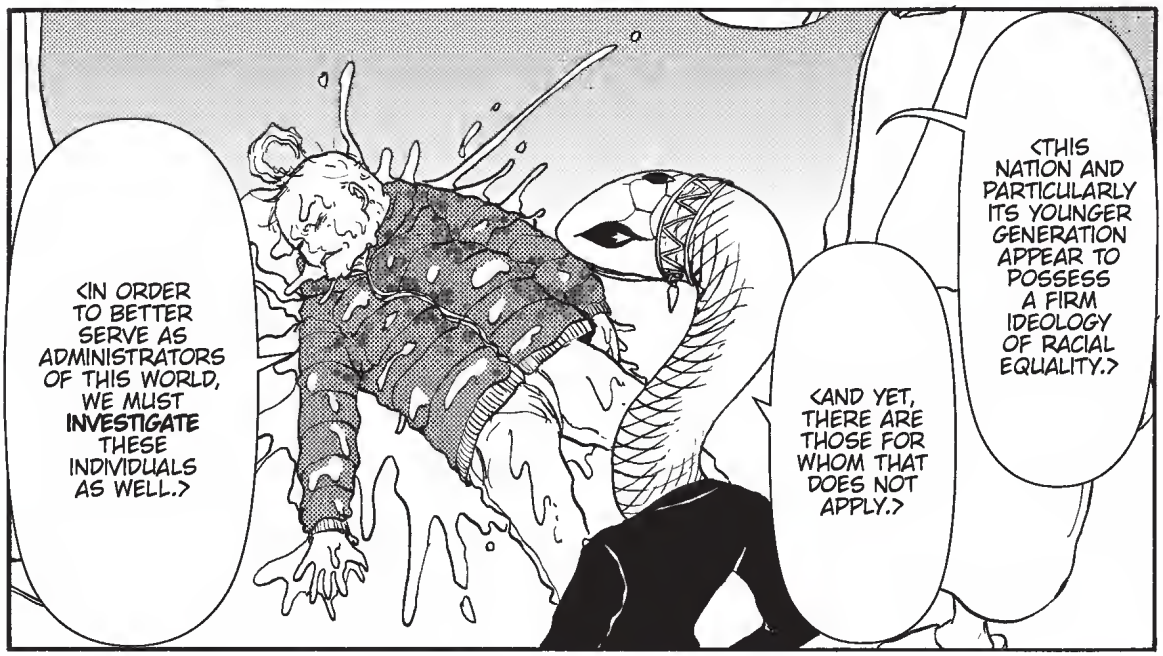


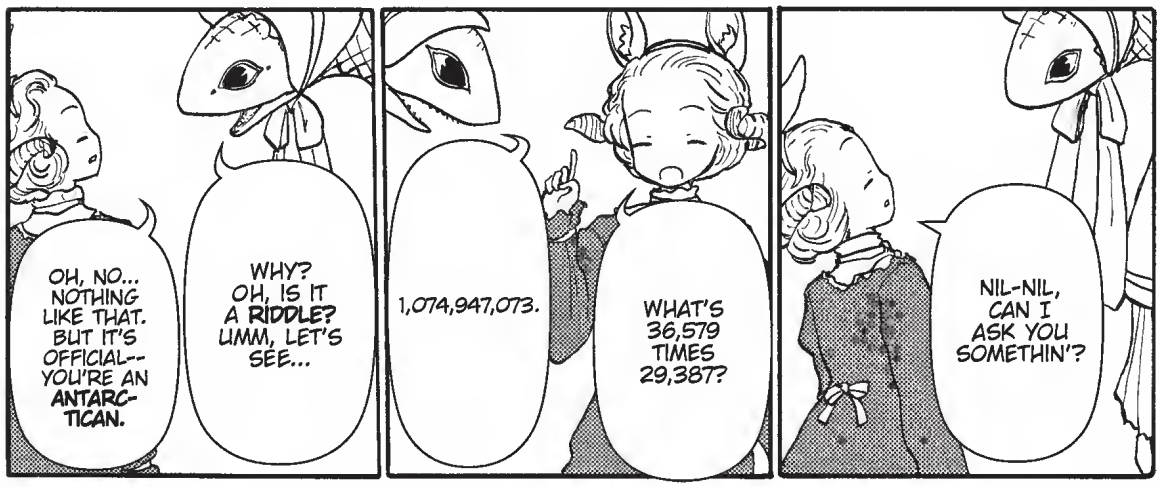

YOU'RE THE VERY PICTURE OF "FANTASY."
ESPECIALLY THESE TWO YOUNG LADIES.
YOU ALL LOOK SO GOOD IN THOSE!
Ehehe!
IT'S ALMOST TOO CUTESY, LIKE A LITTLE GIRL.
HIME, I FIGURED YOU WOULD BE PERFECT FOR THIS, BUT I DUNNO...
<WAIT, WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?>
AND THEN... TO FORT YUKA!
ONCE WE BUY THESE OUTFITS, LET'S GO TO A COSPLAY COMPETITION!


<EVEN IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY, VIOLATIONS OF RACIAL EQUALITY SHAKE THIS COUNTRY'S NATIONAL POLICY.>
<BUT THE POINT IS TO COMPLETELY **REMOVE** AN ATTACKER'S MEANS AND INTENT, RIGHT?>
<JUST SO YOU KNOW, THIS COUNTRY ADHERES TO A **DEFENSE-ONLY POLICY.**>
<COSPLAY IS ONE THING, BUT A MILITARY BASE IS QUITE ANOTHER.>
<SECOND, YOU'RE TRYING TO FURTHER YOUR IDEALS WITH OTHER PEOPLE'S BLOOD.>
<FIRST, YOU'RE TRYING TO INTERFERE TOO MUCH WITH MAMMALIAN SOCIETY, WHICH YOU MUSTN'T DO.>
<YOU'RE COMMITTING ***TWO*** CRITICAL ERRORS.>
What're they talking about?
<WHILE YOU'RE HERE, I WILL *FIRMLY* REEDUCATE YOU.>
Awww...
<YOU'VE BEEN **SPOILED,** AND YOU'VE LET THE MAMMALS HAVE TOO MUCH INFLUENCE ON YOU.>


Blech!
SPLAT


Antarctican Embassy


<IN ORDER TO BETTER SERVE AS ADMINISTRATORS OF THIS WORLD, WE MUST **INVESTIGATE** THESE INDIVIDUALS AS WELL.>
<AND YET, THERE ARE THOSE FOR WHOM THAT DOES NOT APPLY.>
<THIS NATION AND PARTICULARLY ITS YOUNGER GENERATION APPEAR TO POSSESS A FIRM IDEOLOGY OF RACIAL EQUALITY.>

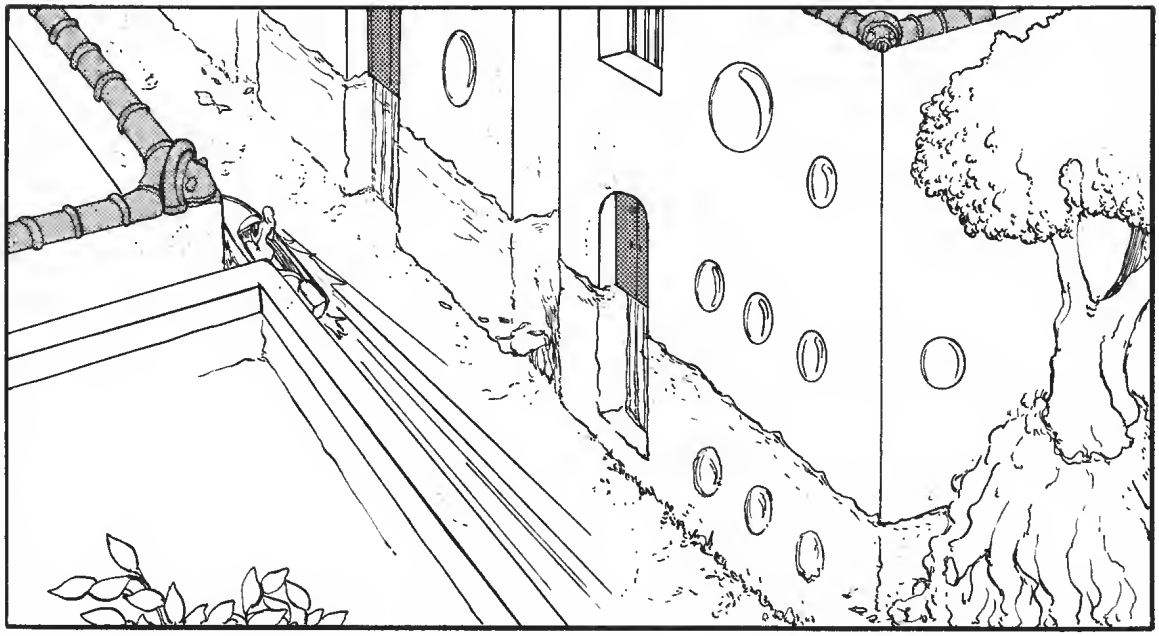

OH, NO... NOTHING LIKE THAT. BUT IT'S OFFICIAL-- YOU'RE AN **ANTARC-TICAN.**
WHY? OH, IS IT A **RIDDLE?** UMM, LET'S SEE...
1,074,947,073.
WHAT'S 36,579 TIMES 29,387?
NIL-NIL, CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHIN'?

A CentaUr's Life

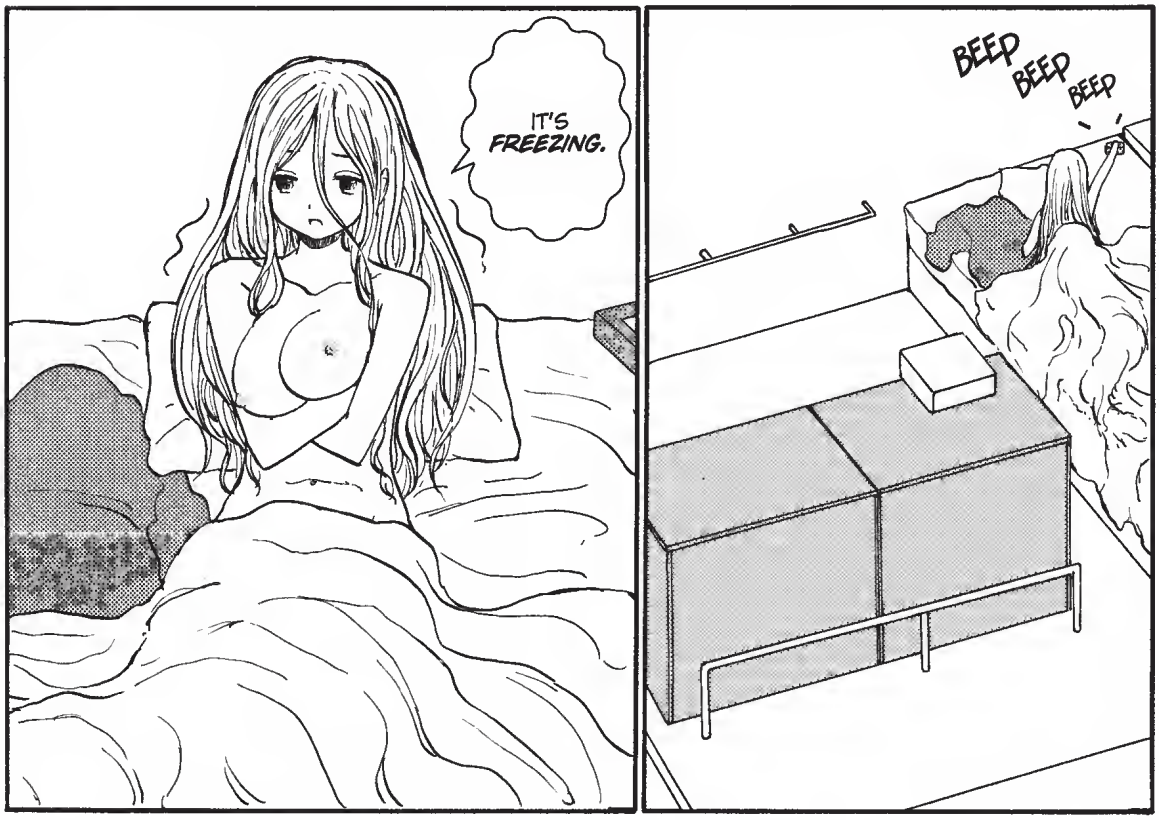
JAPANESE *YOKAI*
TENGU

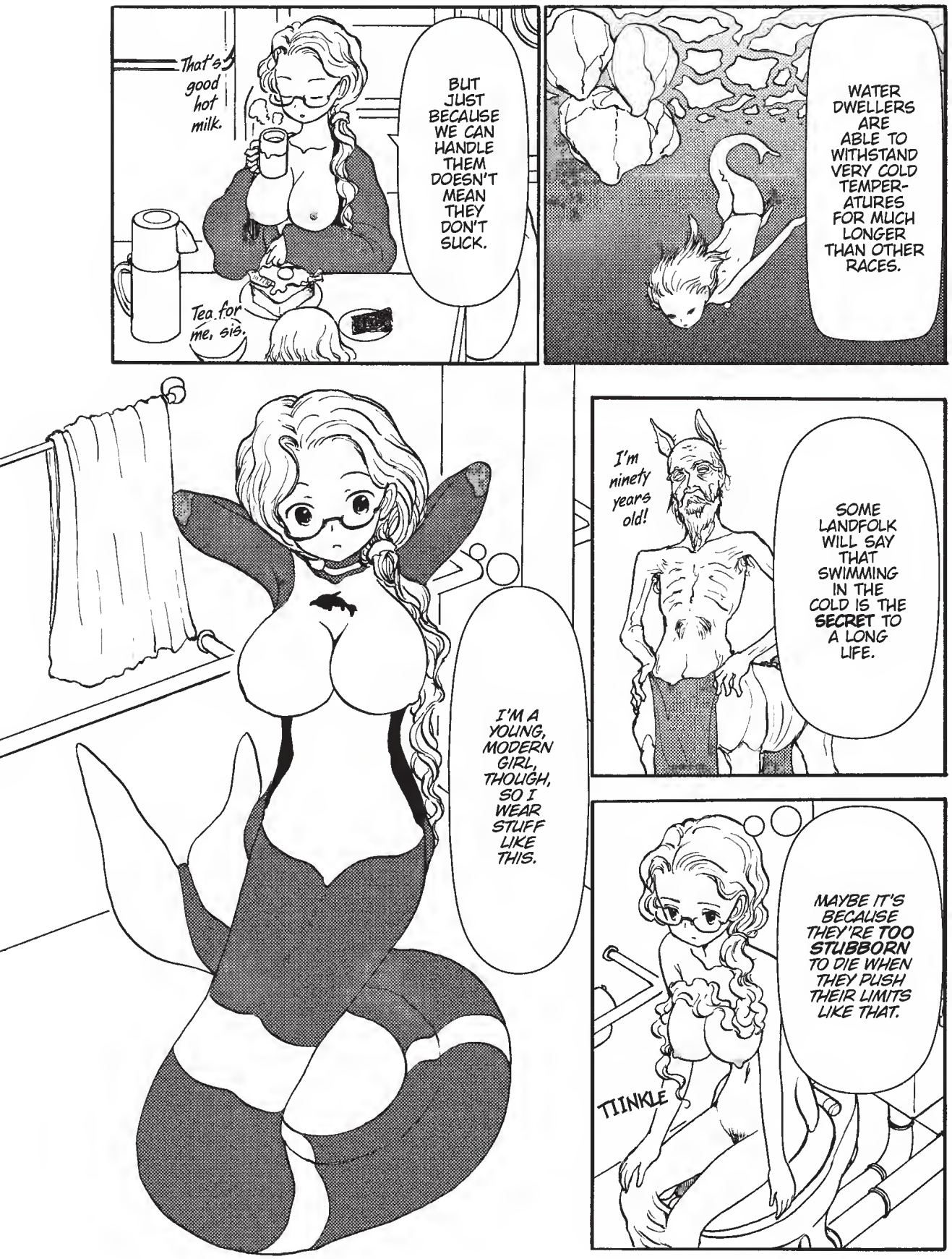
THE WORD *TENGU* ITSELF COMES FROM THE MAINLAND, WHERE IT ORIGINALLY REFERRED TO SHOOTING STARS SOARING ACROSS THE HEAVENS... PARTICULARLY THOSE THOUGHT TO BRING ABOUT MISFORTUNE. IN JAPAN, HOWEVER, ALMOST NONE OF THIS MEANING CARRIED OVER; INSTEAD, IT WAS BELIEVED THAT OVERLY PRIDEFUL BUDDHIST MONKS WOULD BE DAMNED TO A DEMONIC REALM KNOWN AS TENGU ROAD. THE TENGU ALSO HAD STRONG TIES TO MOUNTAIN WORSHIPPING SECTS, AND ARE THOUGHT TO HAVE FREQUENTLY BEEN TIED TO STRANGE OCCURRENCES WITNESSED IN MOUNTAIN REGIONS, WHICH IN TURN HELPED DEFINE THE TENGU'S CHARACTERISTICS.

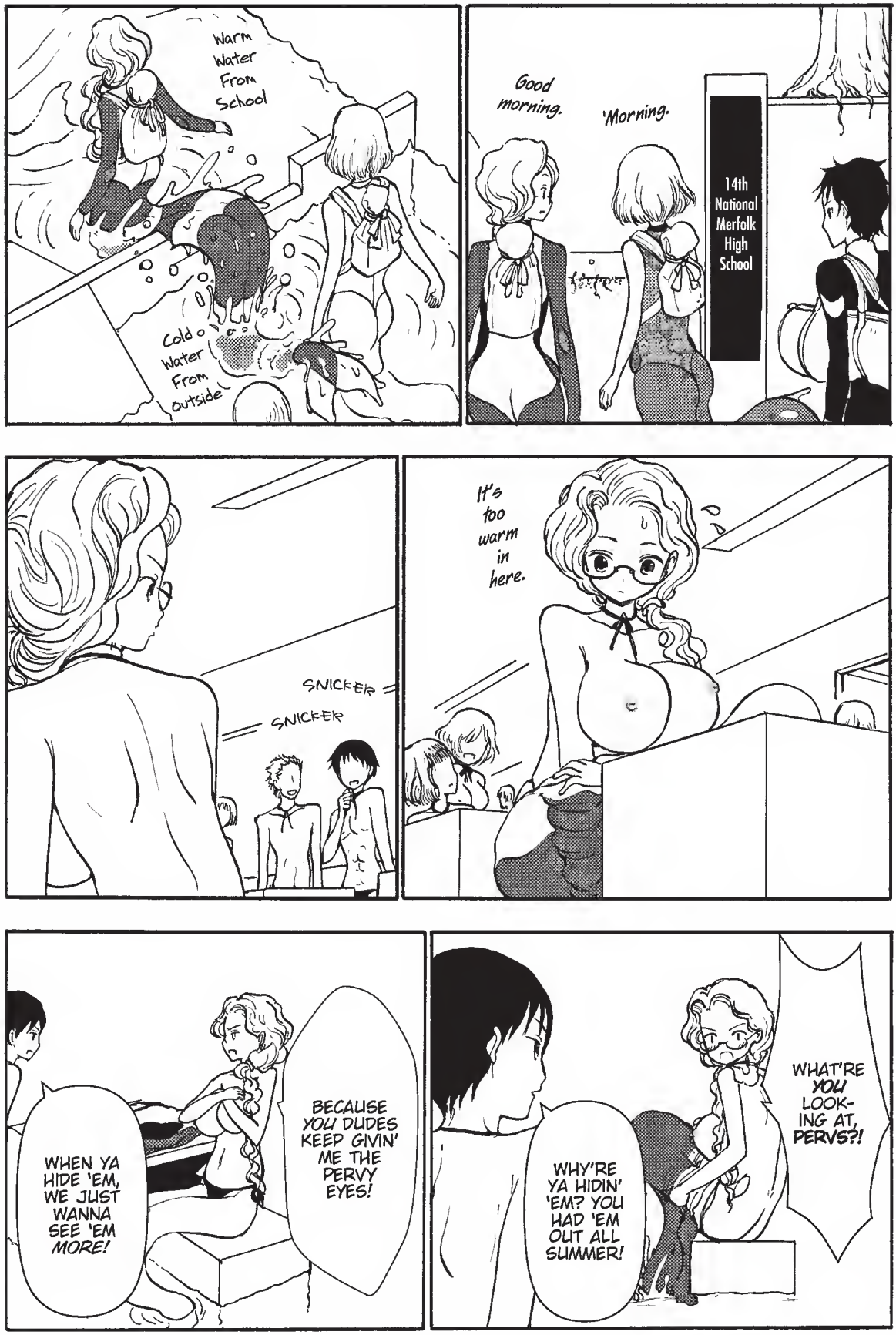
THERE ARE BOTH BIRD-FACED TENGU (BIRD TENGU) AND HUMAN-FACED TENGU WITH LONG NOSES (TALL-NOSED TENGU). THE LONG NOSE OF THE LATTER IS MEANT TO SIGNIFY PRIDE. THE BIRD TENGU, MEANWHILE, IS THEORIZED TO BE BASED ON GARUDA, A BUDDHIST GUARDIAN DEITY. GARUDA, WHOSE ORIGIN WAS IN INDIA, BORE A BIRDLIKE FACE WHICH HIGHLY RESEMBLED THE COMMON IMAGE OF THE BIRD TENGU. BOTH TYPES OF TENGU POSSESS WINGS, ARE CAPABLE OF FREE FLIGHT, AND ARE SAID TO HAVE SUPERNATURAL POWERS, SUCH AS THE ABILITY TO SUMMON TREMENDOUS GUSTS OF WIND.

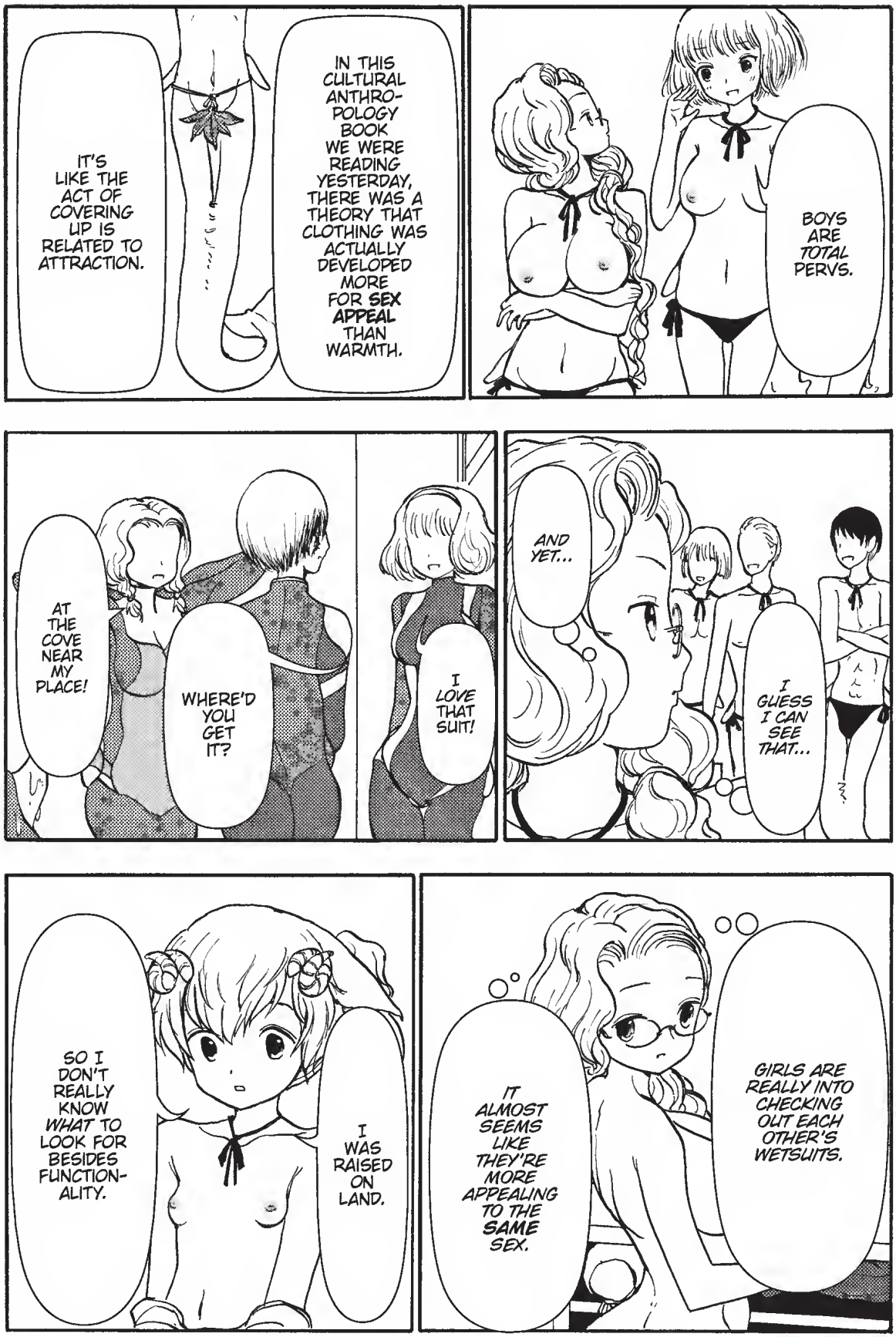


CHAPTER 65




That's good hot milk.
Tea for me, sis.
BUT JUST BECAUSE WE CAN HANDLE THEM DOESN'T MEAN THEY DON'T SUCK.
WATER DWELLERS ARE ABLE TO WITHSTAND VERY COLD TEMPER-ATURES FOR MUCH LONGER THAN OTHER RACES.
I'M A YOUNG, MODERN GIRL, THOUGH, SO I WEAR STUFF LIKE THIS.
I'm ninety years old!
SOME LANDFOLK WILL SAY THAT SWIMMING IN THE COLD IS THE SECRET TO A LONG LIFE.
TIINKLE
MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE THEY'RE TOO STUBBORN TO DIE WHEN THEY PUSH THEIR LIMITS LIKE THAT.


Warm Water From School
Cold Water From outside
Good morning.
'Morning.
14th National Merfolk High School
It's too warm in here.
SNICKER
SNICKER
WHEN YA HIDE 'EM, WE JUST WANNA SEE 'EM MORE!
BECAUSE YOU DUDES KEEP GIVIN' ME THE PERVY EYES!
WHY'RE YA HIDIN' 'EM? YOU HAD 'EM OUT ALL SUMMER!
WHAT'RE YOU LOOK-ING AT, PERVS?!


IN THIS CULTURAL ANTHRO-POLOGY BOOK WE WERE READING YESTERDAY, THERE WAS A THEORY THAT CLOTHING WAS ACTUALLY DEVELOPED MORE FOR SEX APPEAL THAN WARMTH.
IT'S LIKE THE ACT OF COVERING UP IS RELATED TO ATTRACTION.
BOYS ARE TOTAL PERVS.
I LOVE THAT SUIT!
WHERE'D YOU GET IT?
AT THE COVE NEAR MY PLACE!
AND YET...
I GUESS I CAN SEE THAT...
I WAS RAISED ON LAND.
SO I DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT TO LOOK FOR BESIDES FUNCTION-ALITY.
IT ALMOST SEEMS LIKE THEY'RE MORE APPEALING TO THE SAME SEX.
GIRLS ARE REALLY INTO CHECKING OUT EACH OTHER'S WETSUITS.

A CentaUr's Life

JAPANESE *YOKAI*
ROKURO-KUBI
(PULLEY NECK)

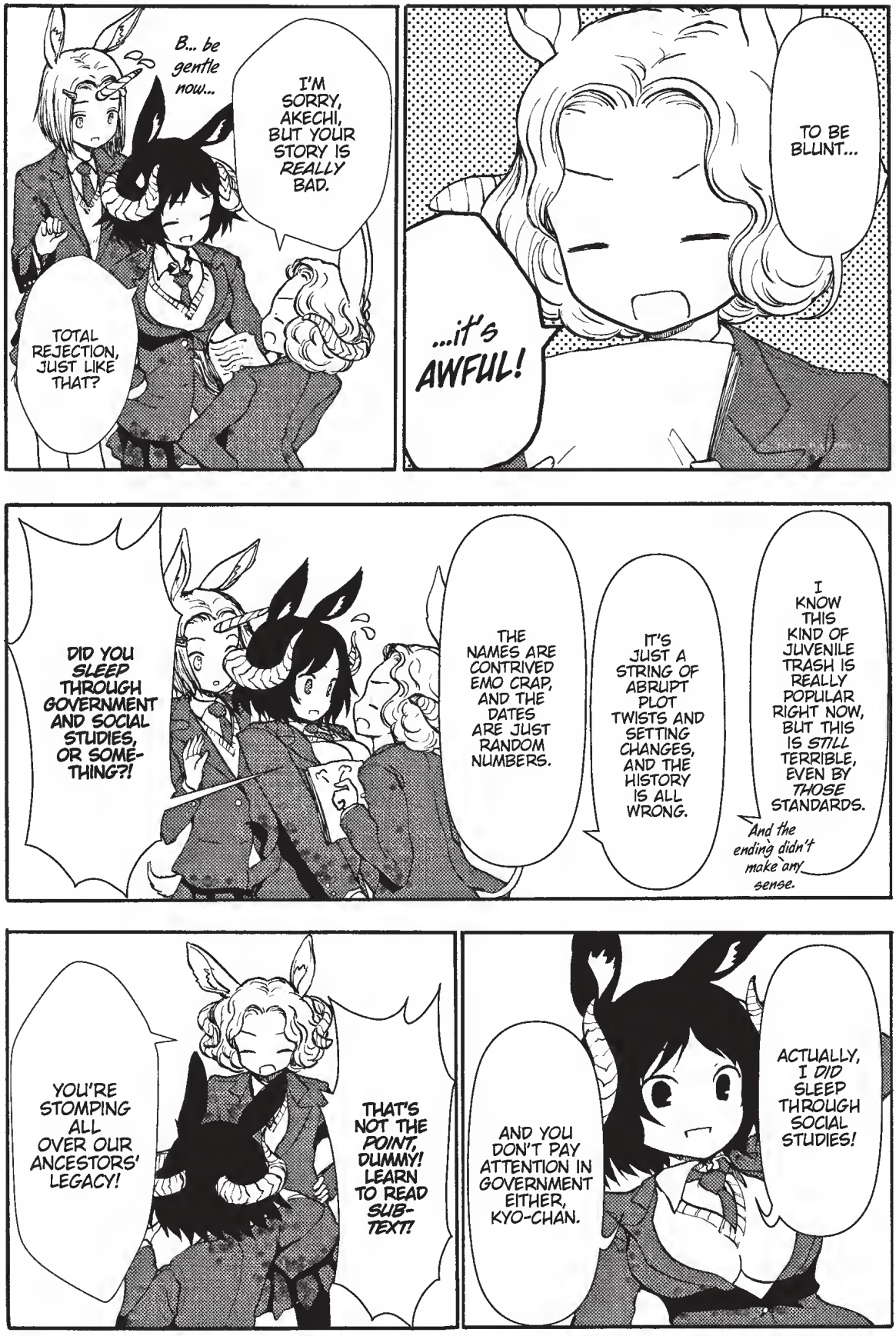
THIS *YOKAI* WAS ORIGINALLY CALLED *HITOBAN* (FLYING HEAD) AND WAS A CREATURE THAT APPEARED TO BE HUMAN DURING THE DAY, BUT THE HEAD DETACHED AT NIGHT TO FLY AROUND AND ATTACK PEOPLE. THE LEGEND GOES THAT TRAVELERS RENTED ROOMS IN A LODGE IN THE MOUNTAINS FROM A FAMILY CLAIMING TO BE FALLEN ARISTOCRATS, BUT THEY WERE ACTUALLY ALL *HITOBAN* PLANNING TO ATTACK THE TRAVELERS AT NIGHT. THE *HITOBAN*, HOWEVER, HAD A WEAKNESS: IF THEIR BODIES WERE MOVED WHILE THEIR HEADS WERE DISCONNECTED, THEY WOULD DIE IN THE MORNING. THE TRAVELERS COULD EXPLOIT THIS TO ESCAPE PERIL.

BECAUSE IT WAS THOUGHT THAT A TUBE-LIKE SPIRIT TRAIL CONNECTED THE *HITOBAN'S* BODY TO ITS DETACHED HEAD, IT WAS DRAWN THIS WAY BY ARTISTS. THIS DEPICTION OF THE SPIRIT TRAIL, HOWEVER, WAS LATER MISTAKEN FOR A LONG, STRETCHING NECK, WHICH IS BELIEVED TO BE THE ORIGIN OF THE LONG-NECKED *ROKURO-KUBI*.

THIS TRANSFORMATION IS NOT MERELY THE PRODUCT OF A MISUNDERSTANDING, BUT ALSO LIKELY THE RESULT OF THE FACT THAT, NEXT TO THE SIMPLE CONCEPT OF A CREATURE WITH A DETACHABLE FLYING HEAD, THE SCARY BUT ALSO SOMEWHAT HUMOROUS IMAGE OF THE *ROKURO-KUBI* IS UNDENIABLY MORE INTERESTING AS A CHARACTER. INDEED, AS *YOKAI* CAME TO DEVIATE FROM THEIR ORIGINAL CONTEXTS AND APPEAR IN OTHER FICTIONAL WORK, THE HEAD-DETACHING *HITOBAN* WAS RARELY SEEN, WHILE THE *ROKURO-KUBI* MADE FREQUENT APPEARANCES.

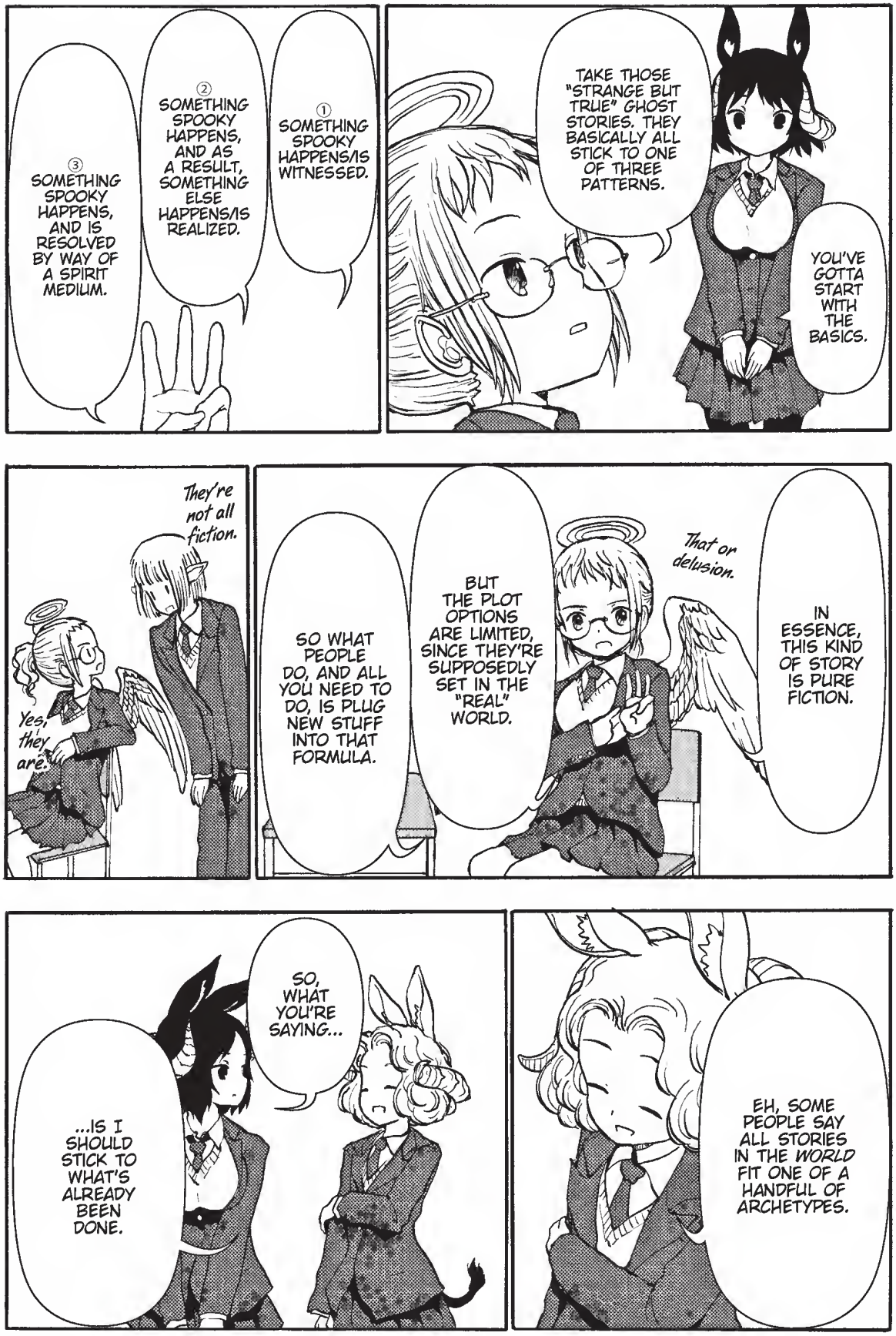
THERE IS ALSO A THEORY THAT THIS *YOKAI* WAS MODELED AFTER ANTARCTICANS, BUT THE THEORY SEEMS TO BE NEGATED BY THE FACT THAT ARTISTIC DEPICTIONS OF THE *ROKURO-KUBI* PREDATE KNOWLEDGE OF OR CONTACT WITH THE ANTARCTICANS.

CHAPTER 66

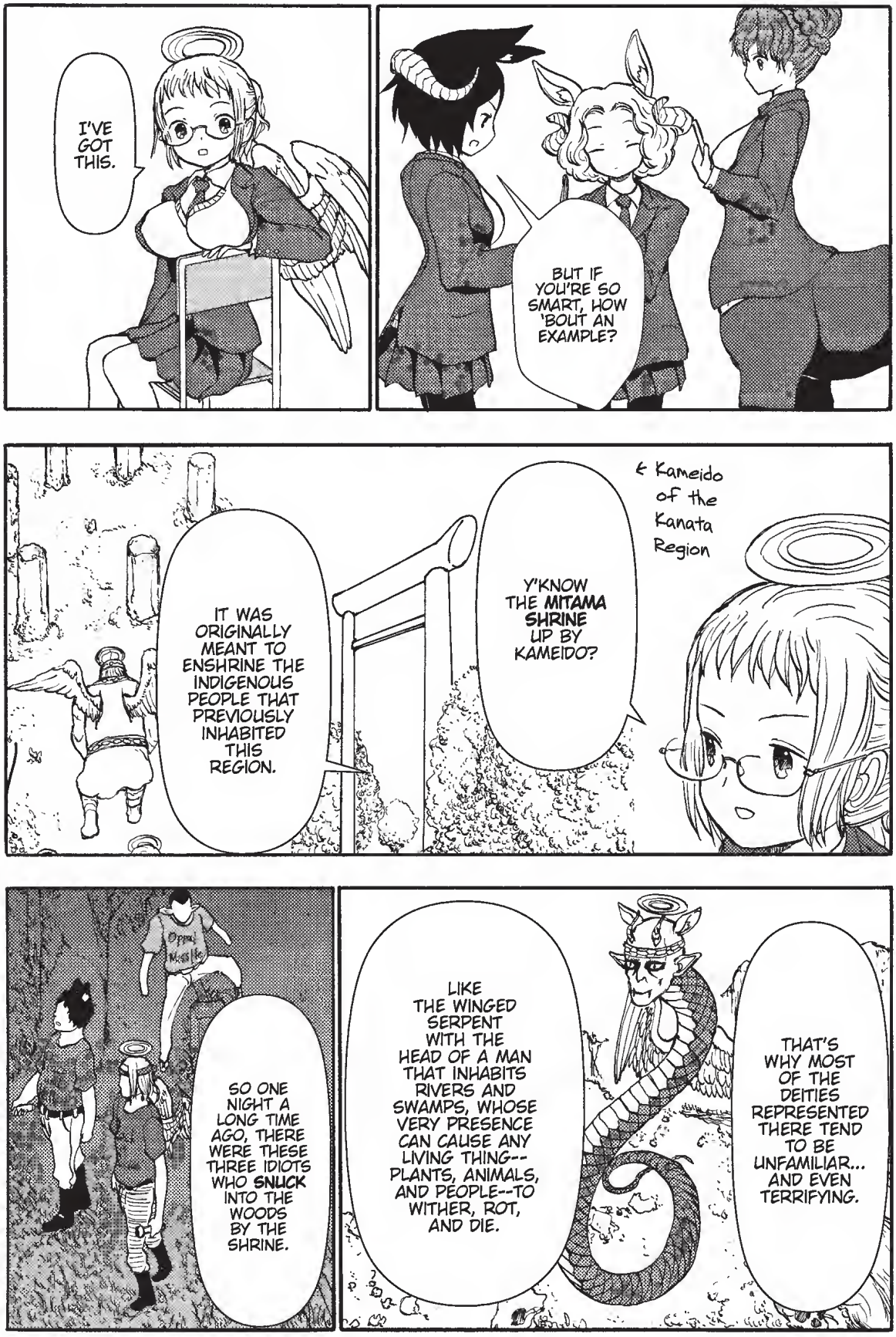

TO BE BLUNT...
...it's AWFUL!
I'M SORRY, AKECHI, BUT YOUR STORY IS REALLY BAD.
B... be gentle now...
TOTAL REJECTION, JUST LIKE THAT?
I KNOW THIS KIND OF JUVENILE TRASH IS REALLY POPULAR RIGHT NOW, BUT THIS IS STILL TERRIBLE, EVEN BY THOSE STANDARDS.
And the ending didn't make any sense.
IT'S JUST A STRING OF ABRUPT PLOT TWISTS AND SETTING CHANGES, AND THE HISTORY IS ALL WRONG.
THE NAMES ARE CONTRIVED EMO CRAP, AND THE DATES ARE JUST RANDOM NUMBERS.
DID YOU SLEEP THROUGH GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL STUDIES, OR SOMETHING?!
ACTUALLY, I DID SLEEP THROUGH SOCIAL STUDIES!
AND YOU DON'T PAY ATTENTION IN GOVERNMENT EITHER, KYO-CHAN.
THAT'S NOT THE POINT, DUMMY! LEARN TO READ SUB-TEXT!
YOU'RE STOMPING ALL OVER OUR ANCESTORS' LEGACY!

W...WELL, KYO-CHAN DOES HAVE A POINT, Y'KNOW.
KYO IS SO MEEEEAN!
HIME-CHAAAN!
Sorry!
SHEESH, HIME. DON'T HOLD BACK OR ANY-THING.
AND FOR A SO-CALLED "CRISIS," THE PROTAGONIST JUST SHOUTS A LOT AND NOTHING ELSE REALLY HAPPENS.
LIKE... YOU MENTION THIS "CRISIS OF THE SUCH-AND-SUCH KINGDOM," BUT YOU KINDA JUST TOSS THE NAME OUT THERE AND THE READER CAN'T SYMPATHIZE.
Me?!
WHAT ABOUT YOU, SASSU-SASSU?

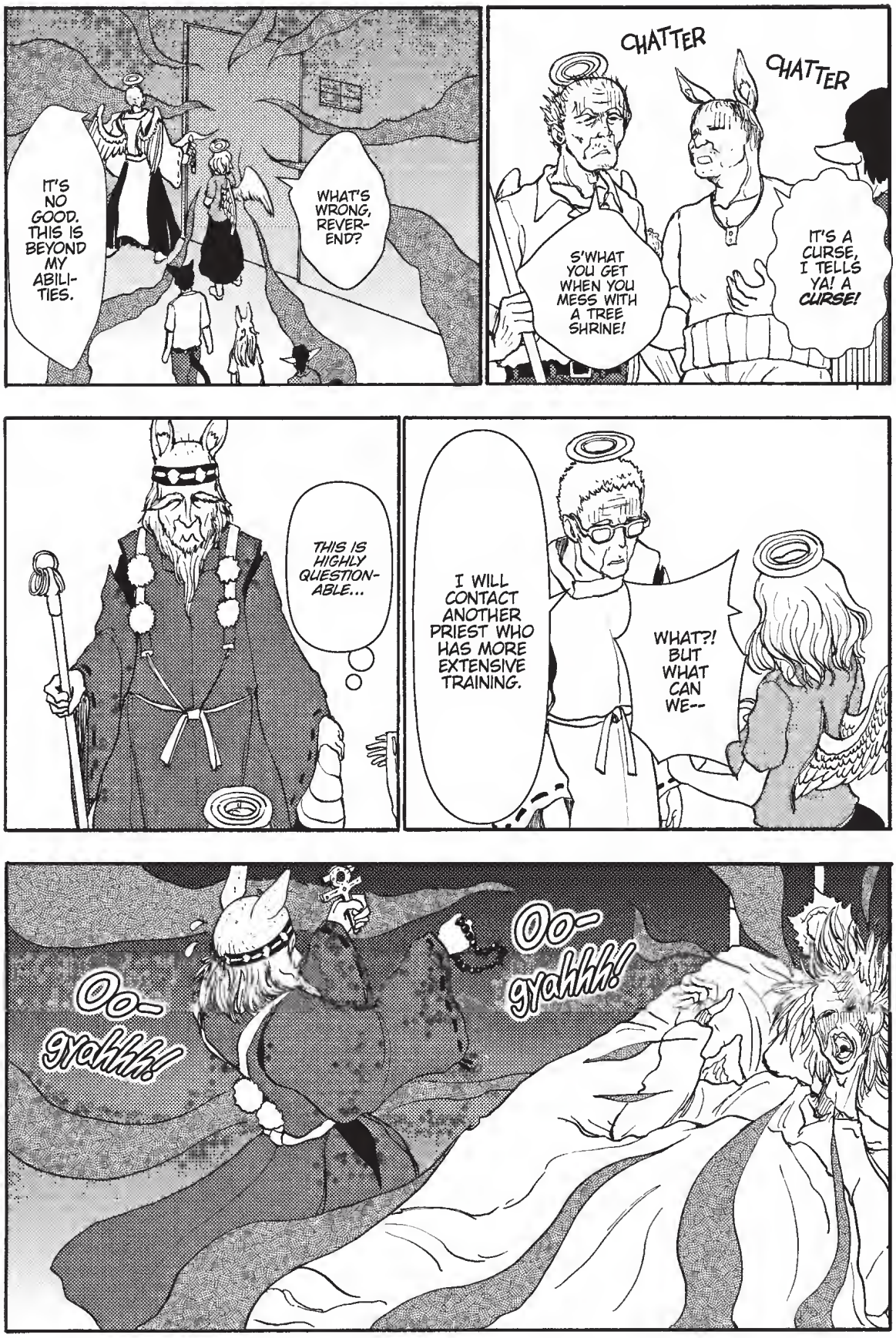
I STILL DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND THIS "LITERATURE" CONCEPT.
What do you think?
THIS IS WHAT THEY CALL "CONTEMP-ORARY POETRY," ISN'T IT?
I studied this!
IT SEEMS TO MAKE SENSE AT FIRST GLANCE, BUT IF YOU READ THE ENTIRE THING, YOU GET A TASTE OF SURREALISM.
THAT'S WHY IT HAS TO BE THIS LONG.
LOOK, WE COULD SPEND ALL DAY LISTING ITS FLAWS.
BUT MAYBE THE PROBLEM IS THAT YOU'RE STARTING WITH SOMETHING TOO AMBITIOUS?
Not you too, shorty-sempai!


TAKE THOSE "STRANGE BUT TRUE" GHOST STORIES. THEY BASICALLY ALL STICK TO ONE OF THREE PATTERNS.
YOU'VE GOTTA START WITH THE BASICS.
① SOMETHING SPOOKY HAPPENS/IS WITNESSED.
② SOMETHING SPOOKY HAPPENS, AND AS A RESULT, SOMETHING ELSE HAPPENS/IS REALIZED.
③ SOMETHING SPOOKY HAPPENS, AND IS RESOLVED BY WAY OF A SPIRIT MEDIUM.
IN ESSENCE, THIS KIND OF STORY IS PURE FICTION.
That or delusion.
BUT THE PLOT OPTIONS ARE LIMITED, SINCE THEY'RE SUPPOSEDLY SET IN THE "REAL" WORLD.
SO WHAT PEOPLE DO, AND ALL YOU NEED TO DO, IS PLUG NEW STUFF INTO THAT FORMULA.
They're not all fiction.
Yes, they are.
EH, SOME PEOPLE SAY ALL STORIES IN THE *WORLD* FIT ONE OF A HANDFUL OF ARCHETYPES.
SO, WHAT YOU'RE SAYING...
...IS I SHOULD STICK TO WHAT'S ALREADY BEEN DONE.

Wait, a zero?!
Come on, don't make me think of tests.
A MEDIOCRE SCORE IS STILL BETTER THAN A ZERO.
I WANT TO WRITE SOMETHING AMAZING!
BUT... THEN I'D JUST END UP WITH SOMETHING MEDIOCRE.
UMM... WELL, YEAH, I GUESS...?
EVEN WITH, SAY, KARATE, YOU LEARN THE BASIC FORMS FIRST, RIGHT?
I GET THAT I'M NO GENIUS.
WHATEVER. YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN, RIGHT?
Hide your panties!
UGH, YOU'RE USELESS TO ME.
COME TO THINK OF IT, I DON'T REALLY REMEMBER DOING ANY BASICS...

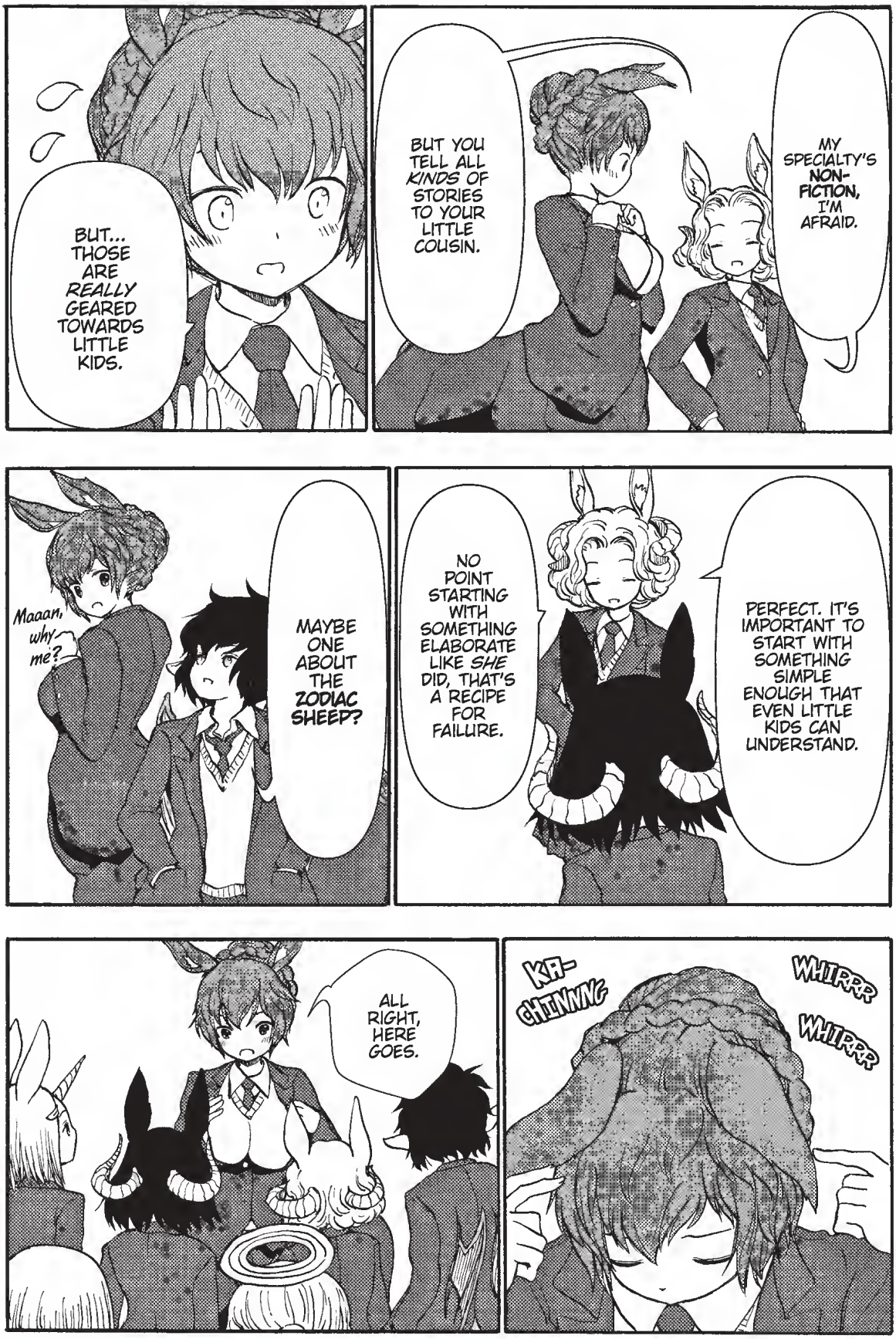

I'VE GOT THIS.
BUT IF YOU'RE SO SMART, HOW 'BOUT AN EXAMPLE?
Y'KNOW THE MITAMA SHRINE UP BY KAMEIDO?
← Kameido of the Kanata Region
IT WAS ORIGINALLY MEANT TO ENSHRINE THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE THAT PREVIOUSLY INHABITED THIS REGION.
THAT'S WHY MOST OF THE DEITIES REPRESENTED THERE TEND TO BE UNFAMILIAR... AND EVEN TERRIFYING.
LIKE THE WINGED SERPENT WITH THE HEAD OF A MAN THAT INHABITS RIVERS AND SWAMPS, WHOSE VERY PRESENCE CAN CAUSE ANY LIVING THING--PLANTS, ANIMALS, AND PEOPLE--TO WITHER, ROT, AND DIE.
SO ONE NIGHT A LONG TIME AGO, THERE WERE THESE THREE IDIOTS WHO SNUCK INTO THE WOODS BY THE SHRINE.

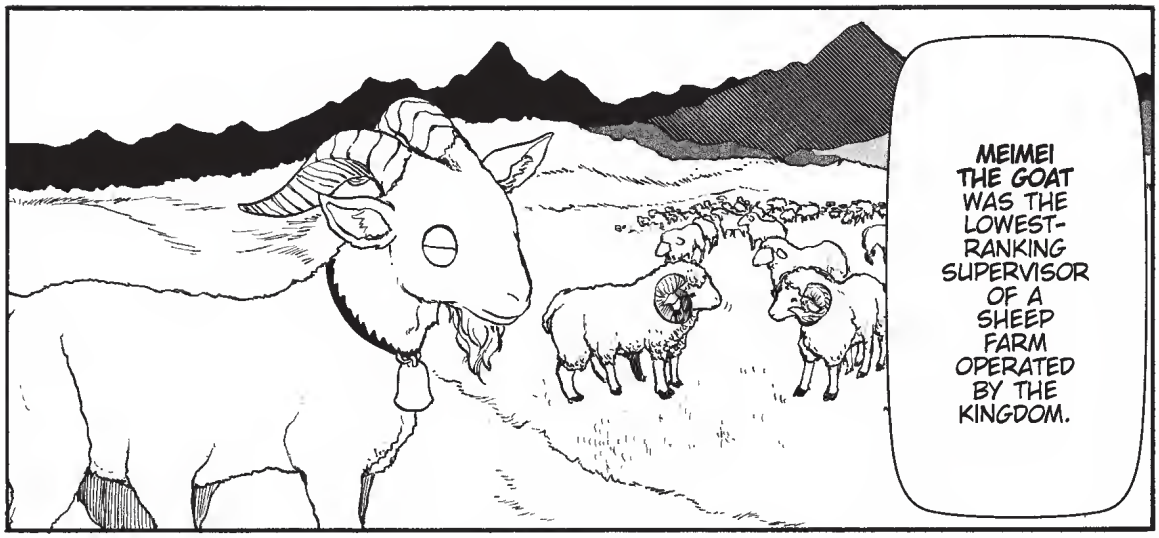
RIP
THIS HAS TO BE THE PLACE.
GAH, EVEN THE INSIDES OF MY SHOES ARE MUSHY.
I *TOLD* YOU TO WEAR BOOTS.
SPLORCH
THAT'S HOW YOU GET IN *REAL* TROUBLE, DUMBASS.
SPLORCH
LET'S BOOGIE. THIS PLACE IS GROSS.
DAMN, I WAS HOPIN' THERE'D BE SOMETHIN' *VALUABLE*.
HARD TO SELL SOMETHING THAT'S OBVIOUSLY STOLEN.
EH, THAT'S HOW THESE DEITY SHRINES ARE.
AW, MAN! IT'S **EMPTY**.
BUT YOU'RE THE BEST DOCTOR THE IMPERIAL UNIVERSITY HAD TO OFFER!
I'VE NEVER EVEN *HEARD* OF SYMP-TOMS LIKE THESE.
THREE DAYS LATER...
HOW-EVER.

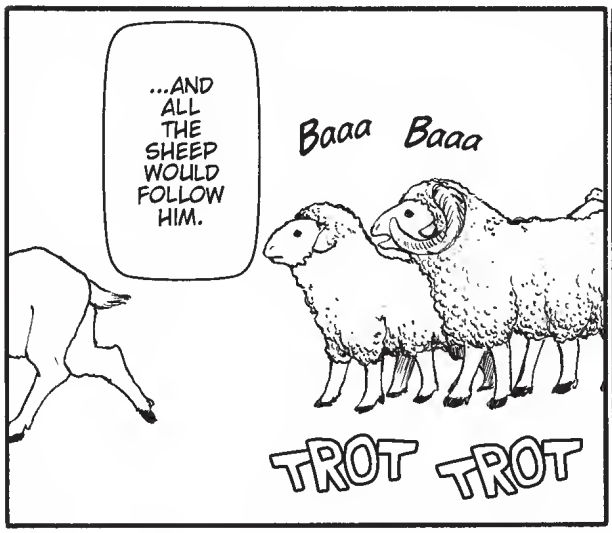

IT'S NO GOOD. THIS IS BEYOND MY ABILI-TIES.
WHAT'S WRONG, REVER-END?
CHATTER
CHATTER
S'WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU MESS WITH A TREE SHRINE!
IT'S A CURSE, I TELLS YA! A CURSE!
THIS IS HIGHLY QUESTION-ABLE...
I WILL CONTACT ANOTHER PRIEST WHO HAS MORE EXTENSIVE TRAINING.
WHAT?! BUT WHAT CAN WE--
Oo-gyahhh!
Oo-gyahhh!

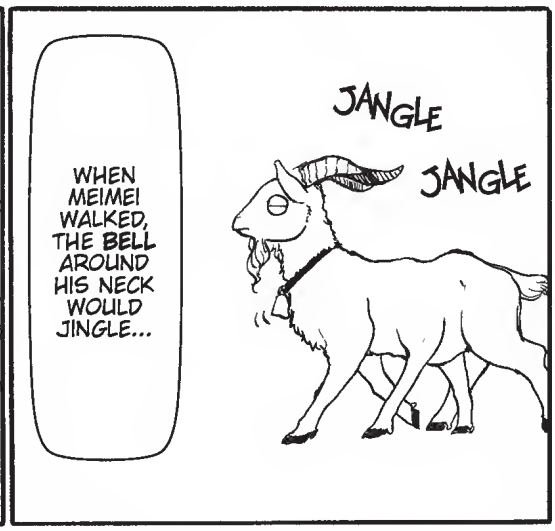
OOF!
WHY ONLY MY CHILD?!
WHOMP
I WAS ABLE TO SAVE THE OTHER TWO, BUT UNFORTU-NATELY...
Saved the guys, right on.
YEAH, ASIDE FROM THE ENDING THAT DID ALL SOUND KINDA FAMILIAR.
SO IT GOES.
POLICE!
CALL THE POLICE!
SAYING IT'S A TRUE STORY.
THAT BLUFF IS THE WHOLE POINT.
Whoa, really?!
LOOK IT UP IN THE LOCAL PAPER FOR AUGUST 14TH, 1973.
BUT IT'S TRUE.

I WANT TO WRITE *FANTASY.*
BUT THAT'S JUST A COOKIE-CUTTER GHOST STORY.
NOT TO PRAISE HER JUST BECAUSE SHE'S THE SENPAI, BUT SHE DID TELL A SOLID STORY, DIDN'T SHE?
SHE EVEN USED FAMILIAR LOCATIONS AND MEDIA TO GIVE A SENSE OF CONNECTION TO REALITY.
UGH, FIIINE.
HOW 'BOUT ANOTHER EXAMPLE USING *THAT* TEMPLATE?
THEN HOW ABOUT THE OL' OVER-THROW-THE-EVIL-KING-AND-SAVE-THE-WORLD TEMPLATE?
IT CAN'T BE THAT SIMPLE.
WH... ME?! WHY ME?!
HIME, LET'S HEAR AN EXAMPLE.

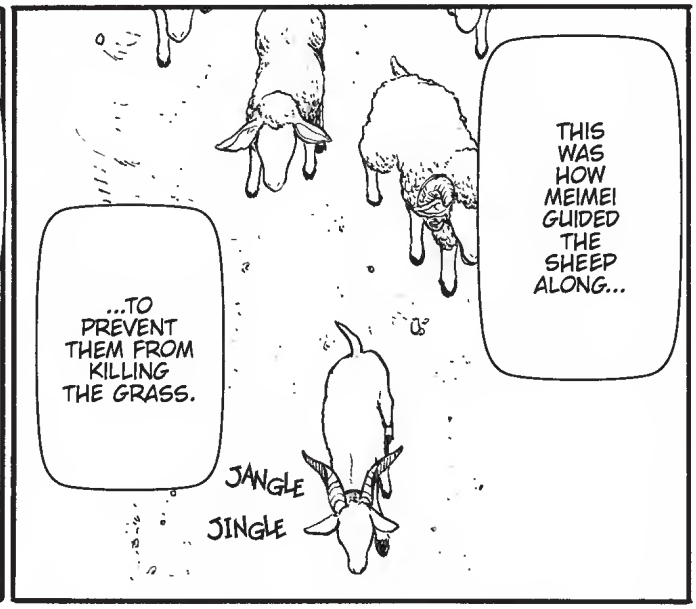

BUT... THOSE ARE *REALLY* GEARED TOWARDS LITTLE KIDS.
BUT YOU TELL ALL *KINDS* OF STORIES TO YOUR LITTLE COUSIN.
MY SPECIALTY'S **NON-FICTION,** I'M AFRAID.
Maaan, why me?
MAYBE ONE ABOUT THE **ZODIAC SHEEP?**
NO POINT STARTING WITH SOMETHING ELABORATE LIKE *SHE* DID, THAT'S A RECIPE FOR FAILURE.
PERFECT. IT'S IMPORTANT TO START WITH SOMETHING SIMPLE ENOUGH THAT EVEN LITTLE KIDS CAN UNDERSTAND.
ALL RIGHT, HERE GOES.
KA-CHINNG
WHIRRR
WHIRRR

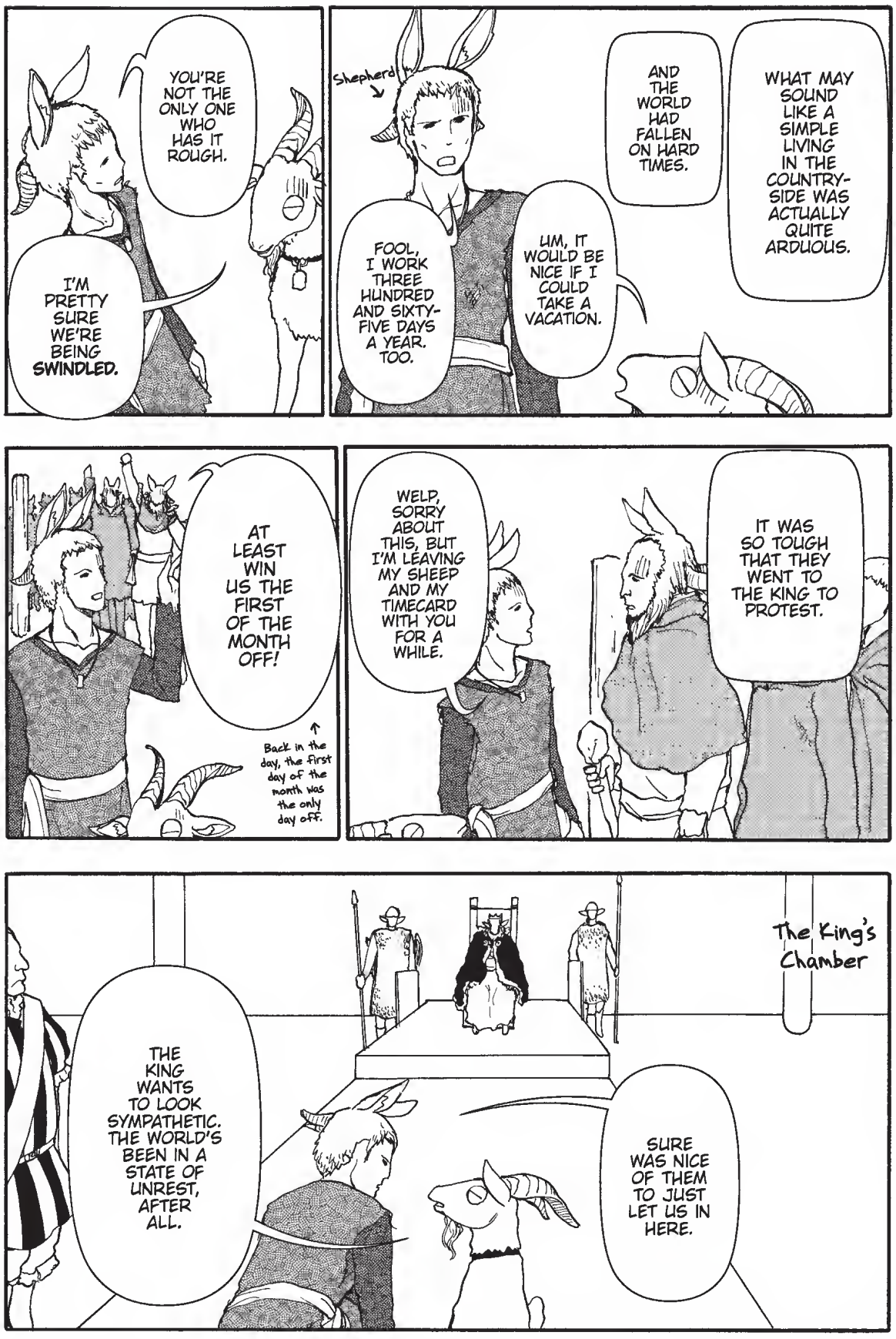

MEIMEI THE GOAT WAS THE LOWEST-RANKING SUPERVISOR OF A SHEEP FARM OPERATED BY THE KINGDOM.

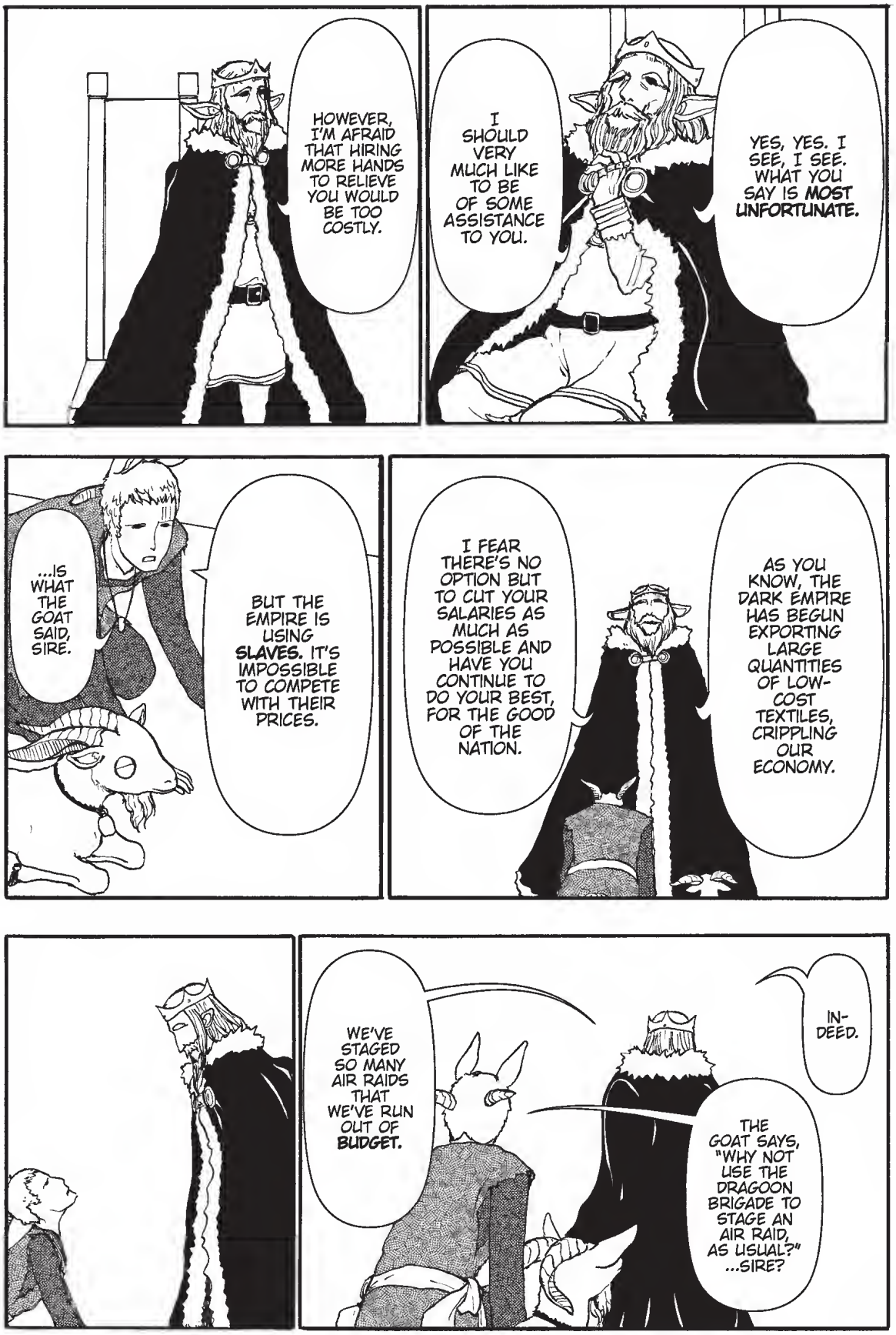

...AND ALL THE SHEEP WOULD FOLLOW HIM.
Baaa Baaa
TROT TROT

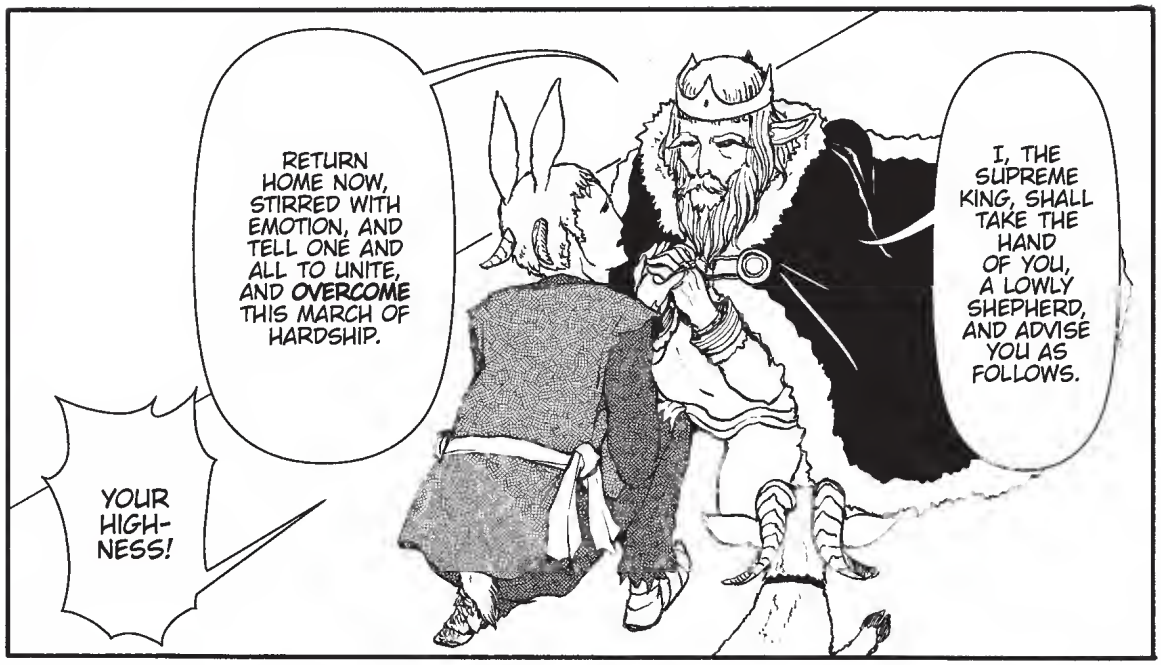

WHEN MEIMEI WALKED, THE BELL AROUND HIS NECK WOULD JINGLE...
JANGLE
JANGLE

WHAT THE...? A GOAT PROTAGONIST INSTEAD OF A SHEEP?
AW, COME ON! THAT'S ALLOWED, RIGHT?

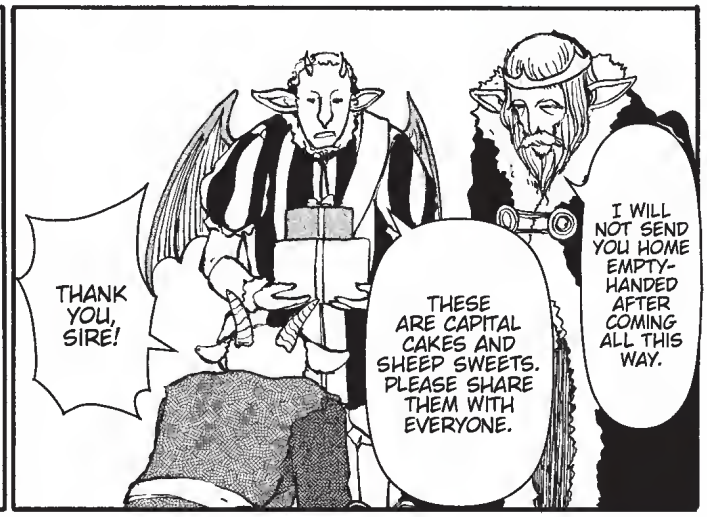

THIS WAS HOW MEIMEI GUIDED THE SHEEP ALONG...
...TO PREVENT THEM FROM KILLING THE GRASS.
JANGLE
JINGLE

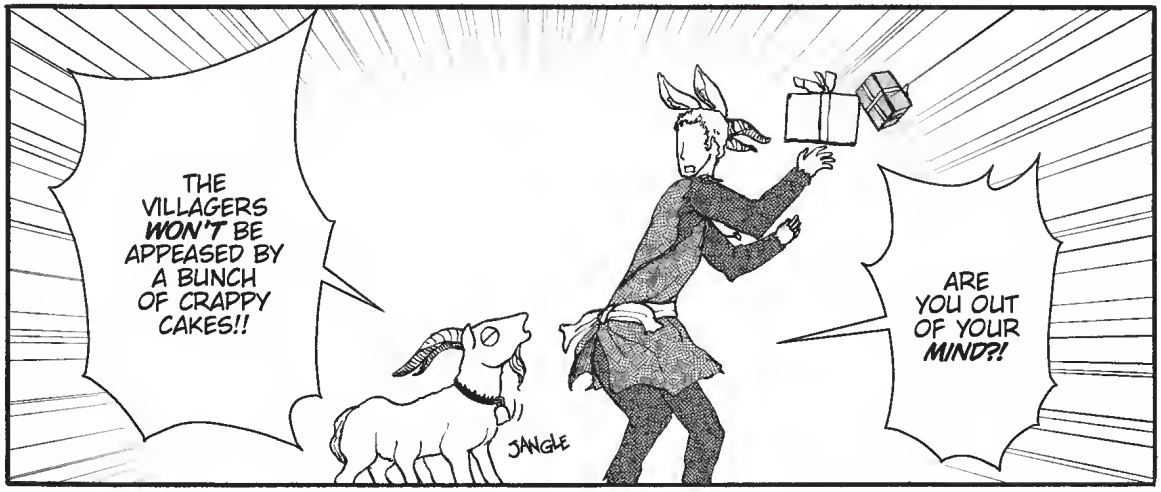

YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO HAS IT ROUGH.
I'M PRETTY SURE WE'RE BEING SWINDLED.
Shepherd
WHAT MAY SOUND LIKE A SIMPLE LIVING IN THE COUNTRY-SIDE WAS ACTUALLY QUITE ARDUOUS.
AND THE WORLD HAD FALLEN ON HARD TIMES.
UM, IT WOULD BE NICE IF I COULD TAKE A VACATION.
FOOL, I WORK THREE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-FIVE DAYS A YEAR. TOO.
IT WAS SO TOUGH THAT THEY WENT TO THE KING TO PROTEST.
WELP, SORRY ABOUT THIS, BUT I'M LEAVING MY SHEEP AND MY TIMECARD WITH YOU FOR A WHILE.
AT LEAST WIN US THE FIRST OF THE MONTH OFF!
Back in the day, the first day of the month was the only day off.
The King's Chamber
SURE WAS NICE OF THEM TO JUST LET US IN HERE.
THE KING WANTS TO LOOK SYMPATHETIC. THE WORLD'S BEEN IN A STATE OF UNREST, AFTER ALL.

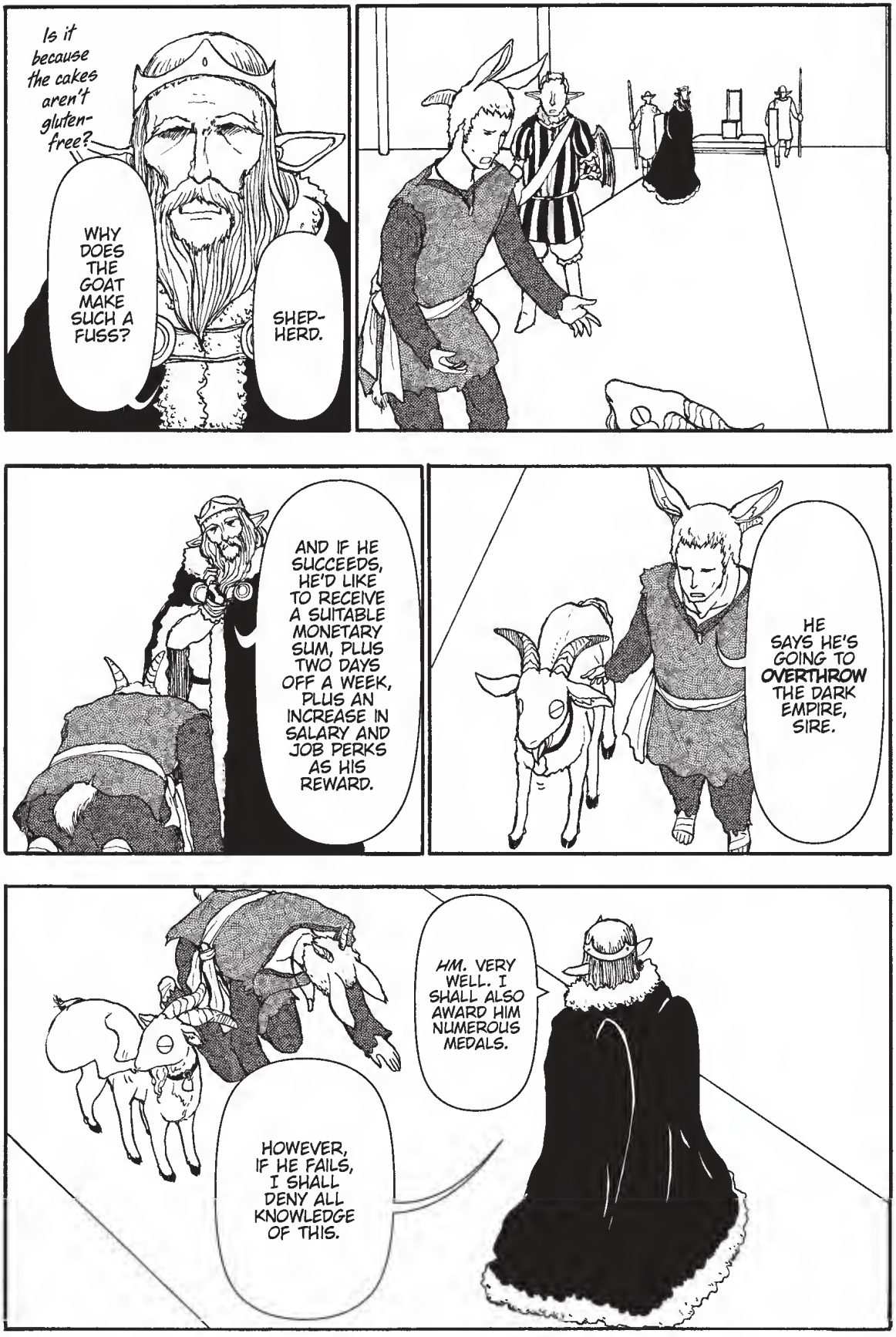

HOWEVER, I'M AFRAID THAT HIRING MORE HANDS TO RELIEVE YOU WOULD BE TOO COSTLY.
I SHOULD VERY MUCH LIKE TO BE OF SOME ASSISTANCE TO YOU.
YES, YES. I SEE, I SEE. WHAT YOU SAY IS **MOST UNFORTUNATE.**
...IS WHAT THE GOAT SAID, SIRE.
BUT THE EMPIRE IS USING **SLAVES.** IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO COMPETE WITH THEIR PRICES.
I FEAR THERE'S NO OPTION BUT TO CUT YOUR SALARIES AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE AND HAVE YOU CONTINUE TO DO YOUR BEST, FOR THE GOOD OF THE NATION.
AS YOU KNOW, THE DARK EMPIRE HAS BEGUN EXPORTING LARGE QUANTITIES OF LOW-COST TEXTILES, CRIPPLING OUR ECONOMY.
WE'VE STAGED SO MANY AIR RAIDS THAT WE'VE RUN OUT OF **BUDGET.**
THE GOAT SAYS, "WHY NOT USE THE DRAGOON BRIGADE TO STAGE AN AIR RAID, AS USUAL?" ...SIRE?
IN-DEED.

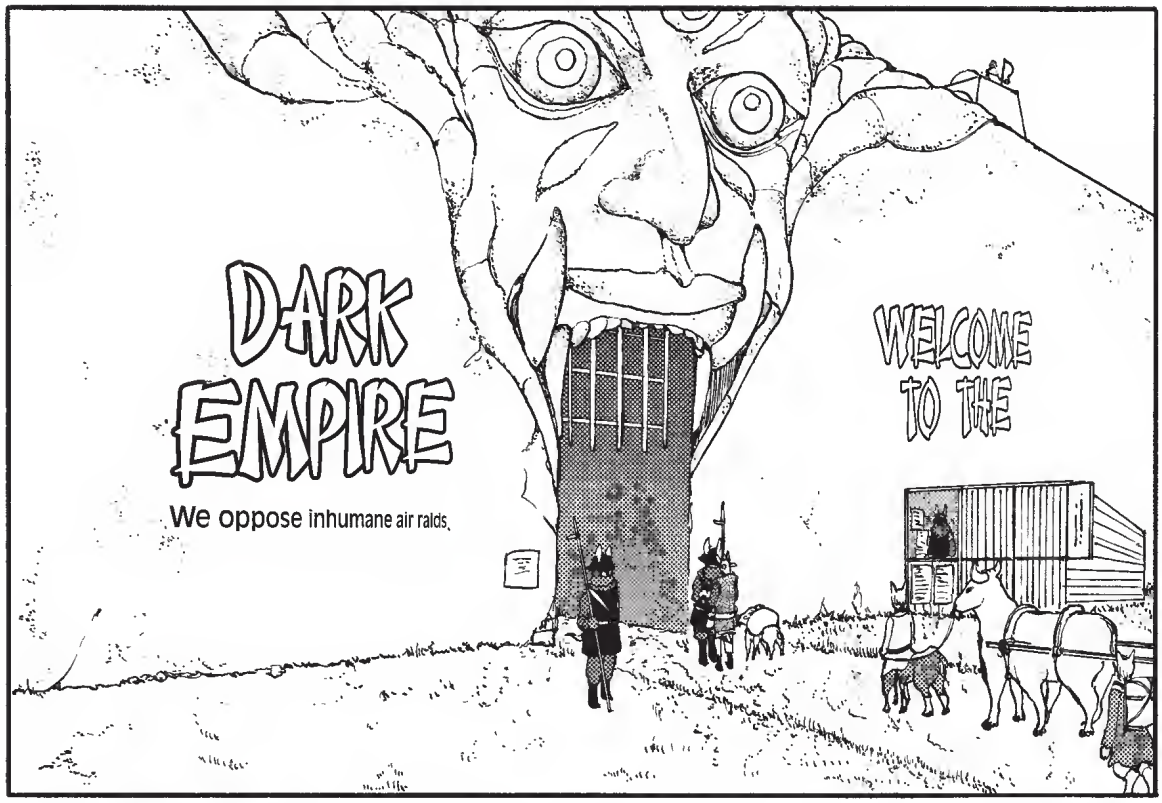

I, THE SUPREME KING, SHALL TAKE THE HAND OF YOU, A LOWLY SHEPHERD, AND ADVISE YOU AS FOLLOWS.
RETURN HOME NOW, STIRRED WITH EMOTION, AND TELL ONE AND ALL TO UNITE, AND **OVERCOME** THIS MARCH OF HARDSHIP.
YOUR HIGH-NESS!

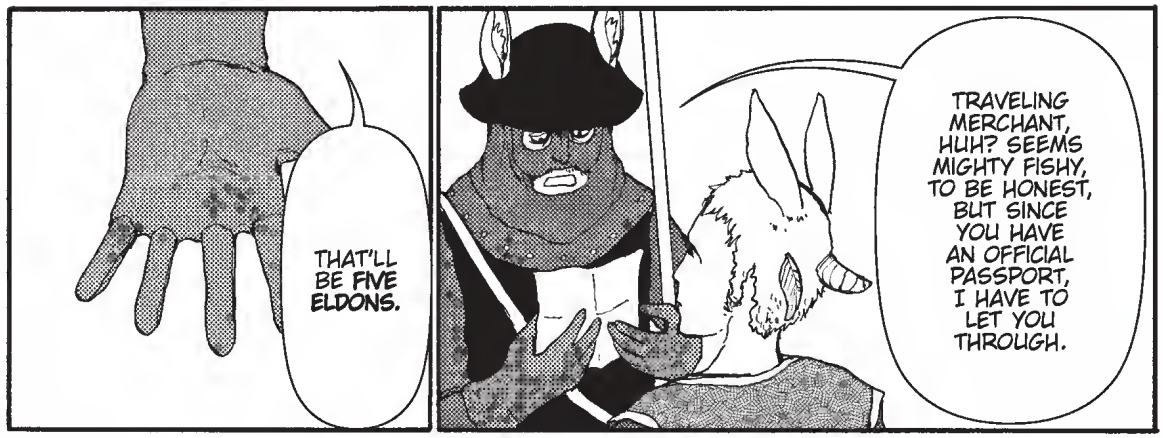
WELP, LET'S GO BACK TO THE VIL-LAGE.

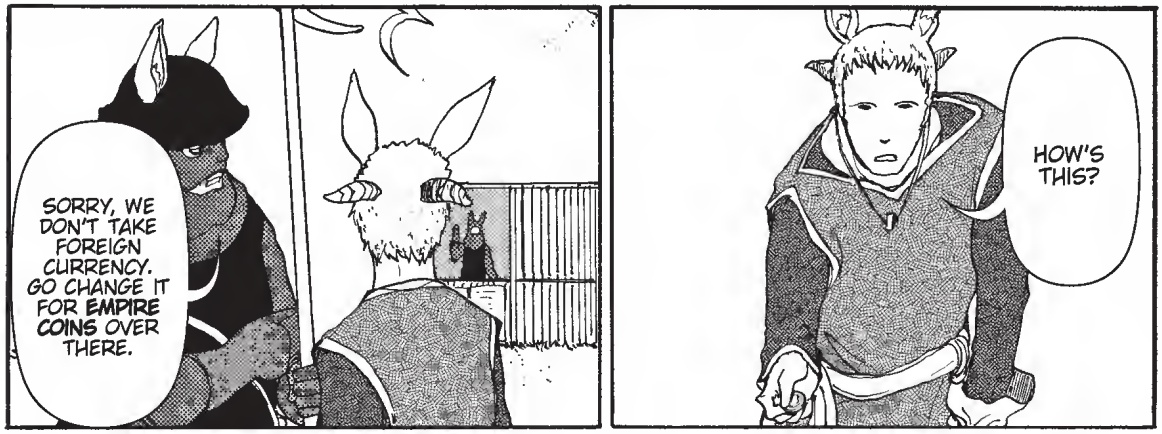

I WILL NOT SEND YOU HOME EMPTY-HANDED AFTER COMING ALL THIS WAY.
THESE ARE CAPITAL CAKES AND SHEEP SWEETS. PLEASE SHARE THEM WITH EVERYONE.
THANK YOU, SIRE!

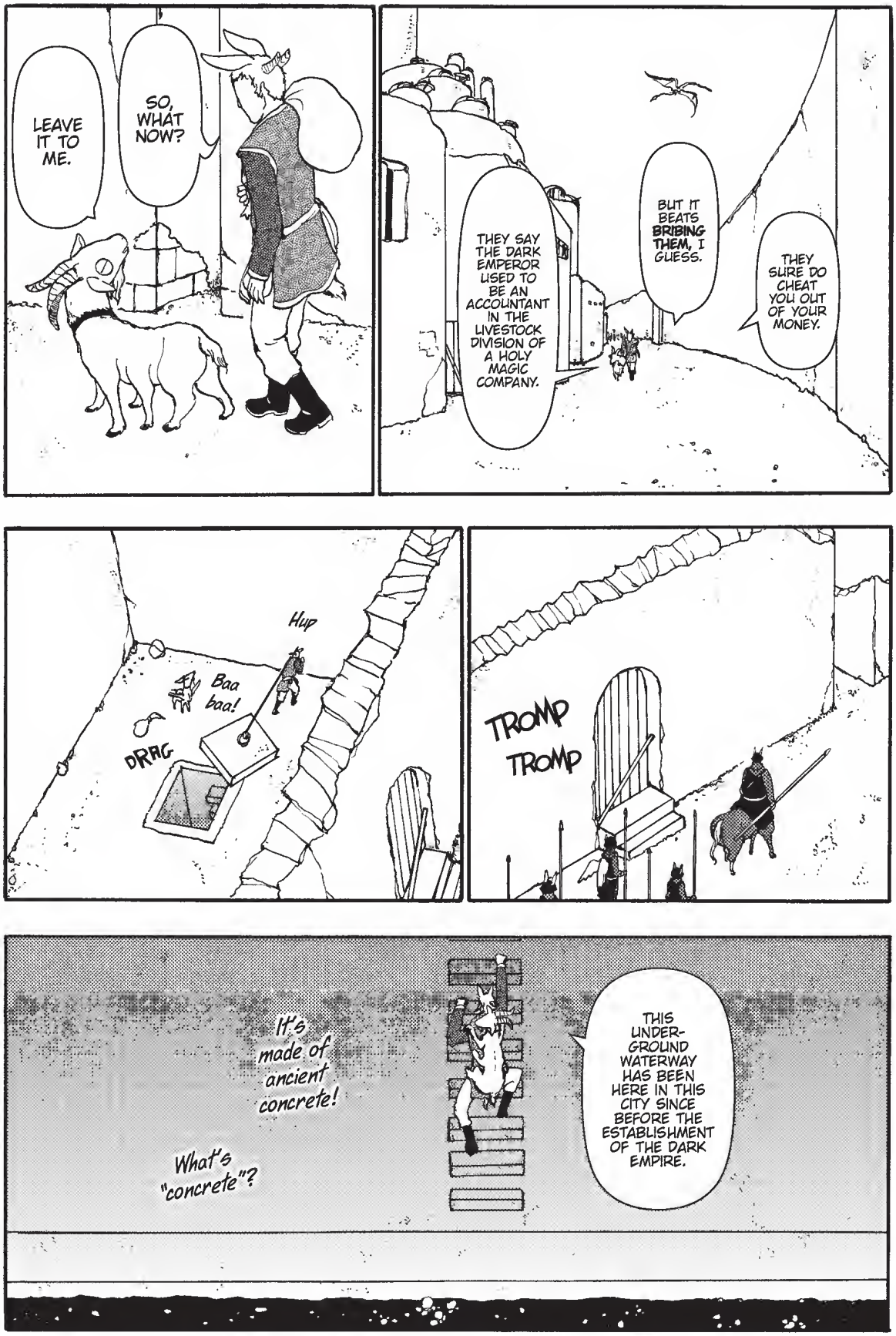

ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR ***MIND?!***
THE VILLAGERS ***WON'T*** BE APPEASED BY A BUNCH OF CRAPPY CAKES!!
JANGLE

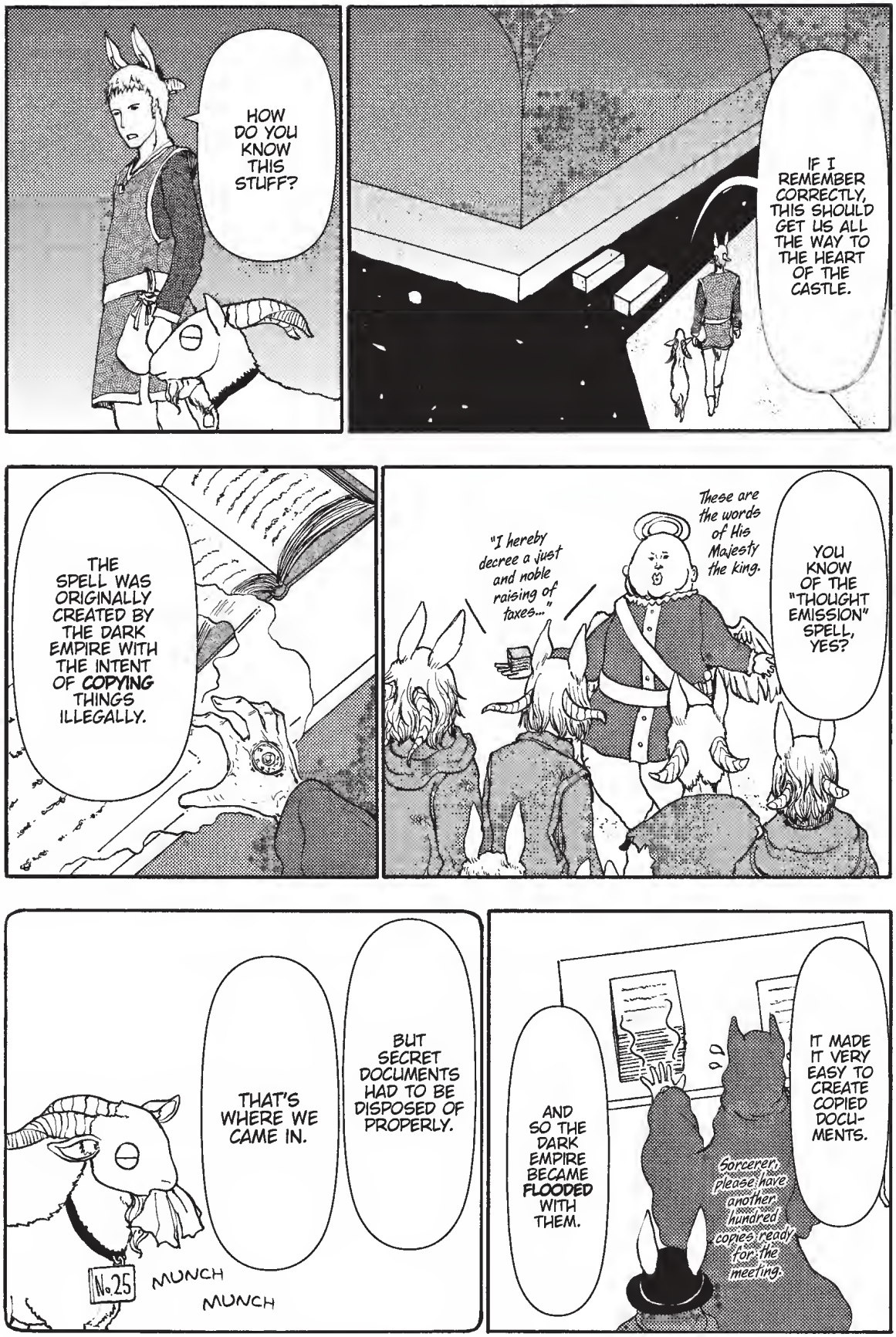

Is it because the cakes aren't gluten-free?
WHY DOES THE GOAT MAKE SUCH A FUSS?
SHEP-HERD.
AND IF HE SUCCEEDS, HE'D LIKE TO RECEIVE A SUITABLE MONETARY SUM, PLUS TWO DAYS OFF A WEEK, PLUS AN INCREASE IN SALARY AND JOB PERKS AS HIS REWARD.
HE SAYS HE'S GOING TO OVERTHROW THE DARK EMPIRE, SIRE.
HM. VERY WELL. I SHALL ALSO AWARD HIM NUMEROUS MEDALS.
HOWEVER, IF HE FAILS, I SHALL DENY ALL KNOWLEDGE OF THIS.


DARK EMPIRE
We oppose inhumane air raids.
WELCOME TO THE

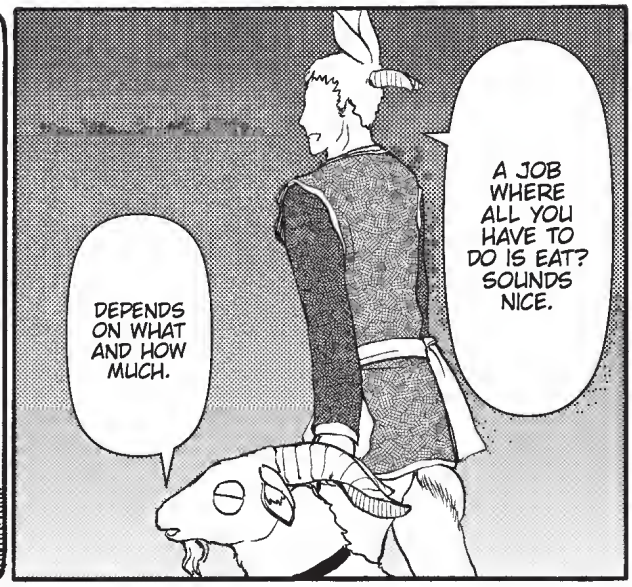

THAT'LL BE FIVE ELDONS.
TRAVELING MERCHANT, HUH? SEEMS MIGHTY FISHY, TO BE HONEST, BUT SINCE YOU HAVE AN OFFICIAL PASSPORT, I HAVE TO LET YOU THROUGH.

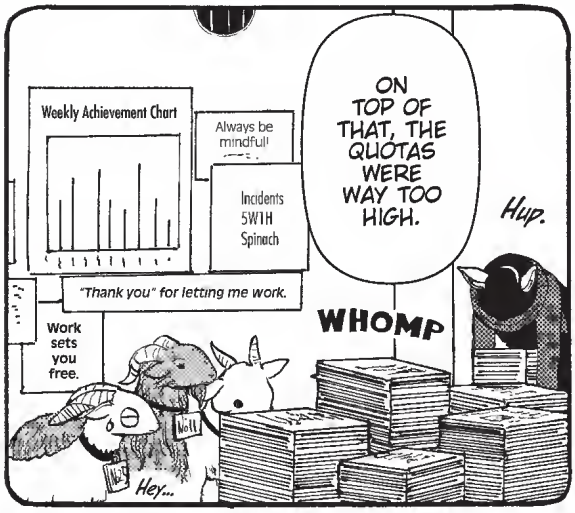

SORRY, WE DON'T TAKE FOREIGN CURRENCY. GO CHANGE IT FOR EMPIRE COINS OVER THERE.
HOW'S THIS?

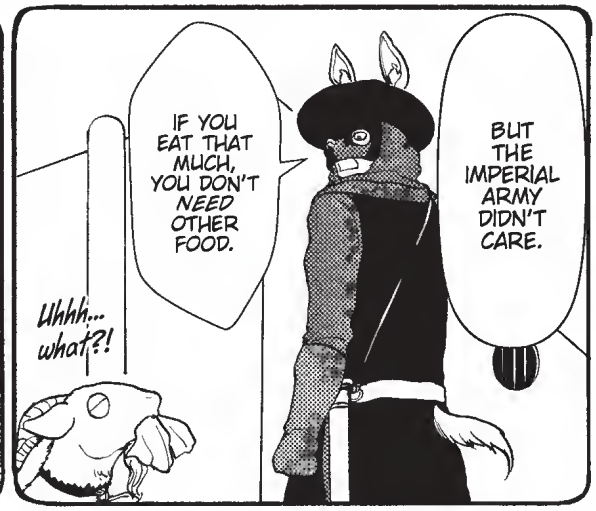

LEAVE IT TO ME.
SO, WHAT NOW?
THEY SAY THE DARK EMPEROR USED TO BE AN ACCOUNTANT IN THE LIVESTOCK DIVISION OF A HOLY MAGIC COMPANY.
BUT IT BEATS BRIBING THEM, I GUESS.
THEY SURE DO CHEAT YOU OUT OF YOUR MONEY.
Hup
Baa baa!
DRAG
TROMP TROMP
THIS UNDER-GROUND WATERWAY HAS BEEN HERE IN THIS CITY SINCE BEFORE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DARK EMPIRE.
It's made of ancient concrete!
What's "concrete"?


HOW DO YOU KNOW THIS STUFF?
IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, THIS SHOULD GET US ALL THE WAY TO THE HEART OF THE CASTLE.
THE SPELL WAS ORIGINALLY CREATED BY THE DARK EMPIRE WITH THE INTENT OF COPYING THINGS ILLEGALLY.
"I hereby decree a just and noble raising of taxes..."
These are the words of His Majesty the king.
YOU KNOW OF THE "THOUGHT EMISSION" SPELL, YES?
THAT'S WHERE WE CAME IN.
BUT SECRET DOCUMENTS HAD TO BE DISPOSED OF PROPERLY.
No.25
MUNCH MUNCH
AND SO THE DARK EMPIRE BECAME FLOODED WITH THEM.
Sorcerer, please have another hundred copies ready for the meeting.
IT MADE IT VERY EASY TO CREATE COPIED DOCUMENTS.

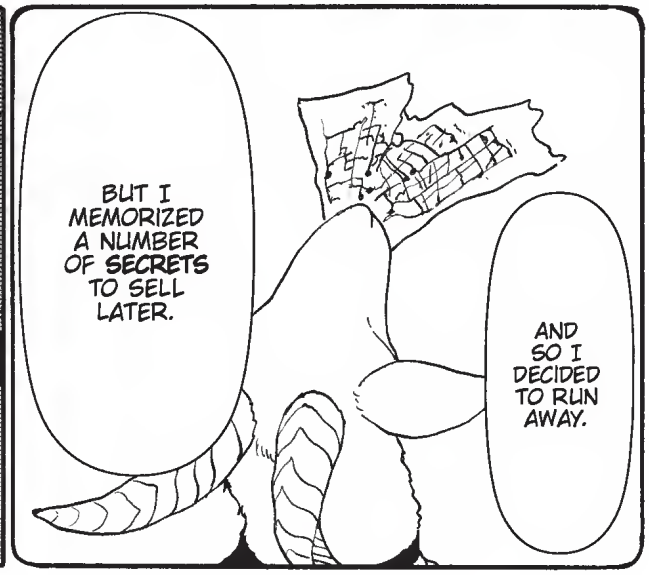
A PAPER-ONLY DIET LEADS TO VITAMIN DEFICIENCY.
SEE, GOATS DON'T EAT ONLY GRASS... WE ALSO EAT FRUIT AND SPROUTS.
No.25

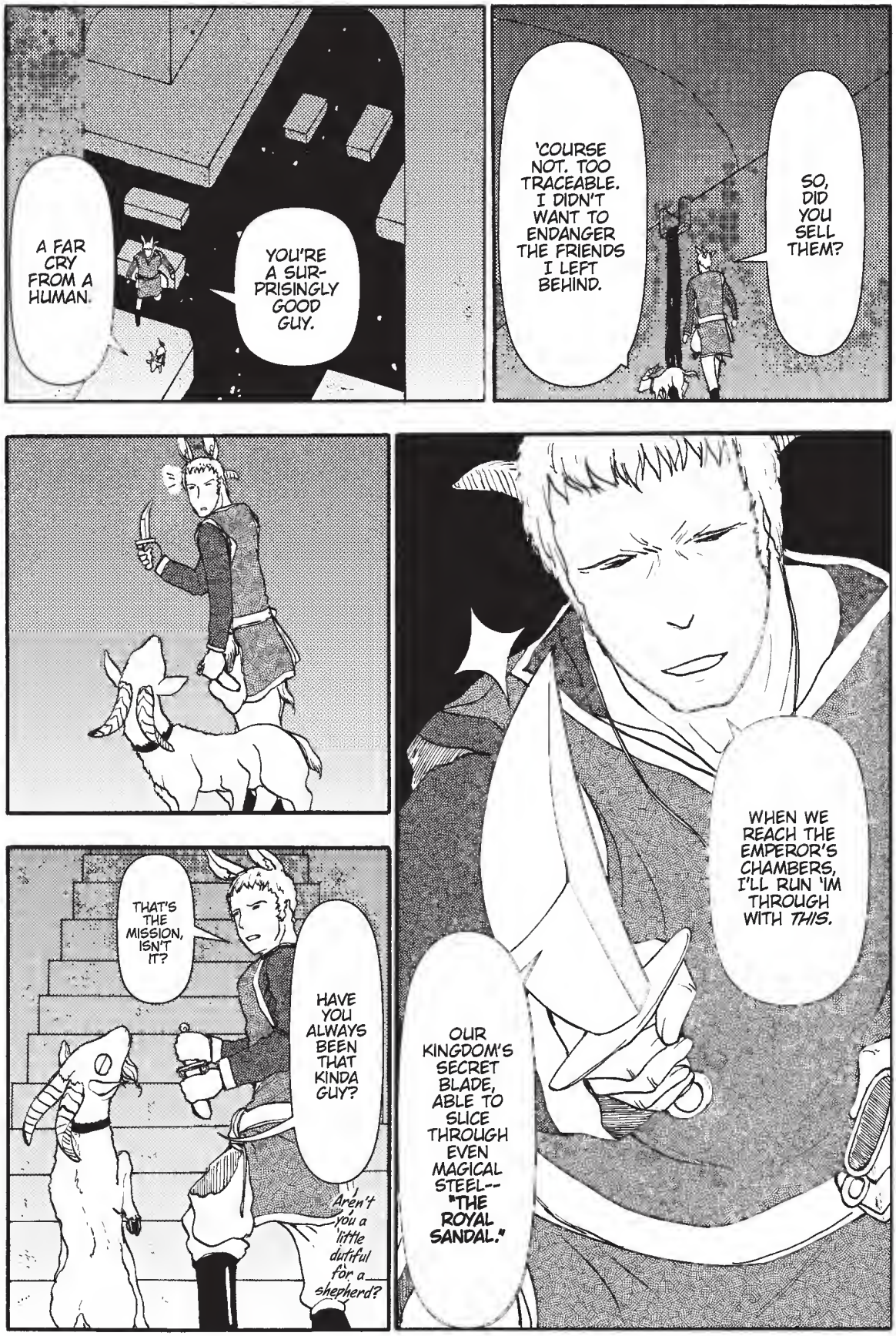

A JOB WHERE ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS EAT? SOUNDS NICE.
DEPENDS ON WHAT AND HOW MUCH.

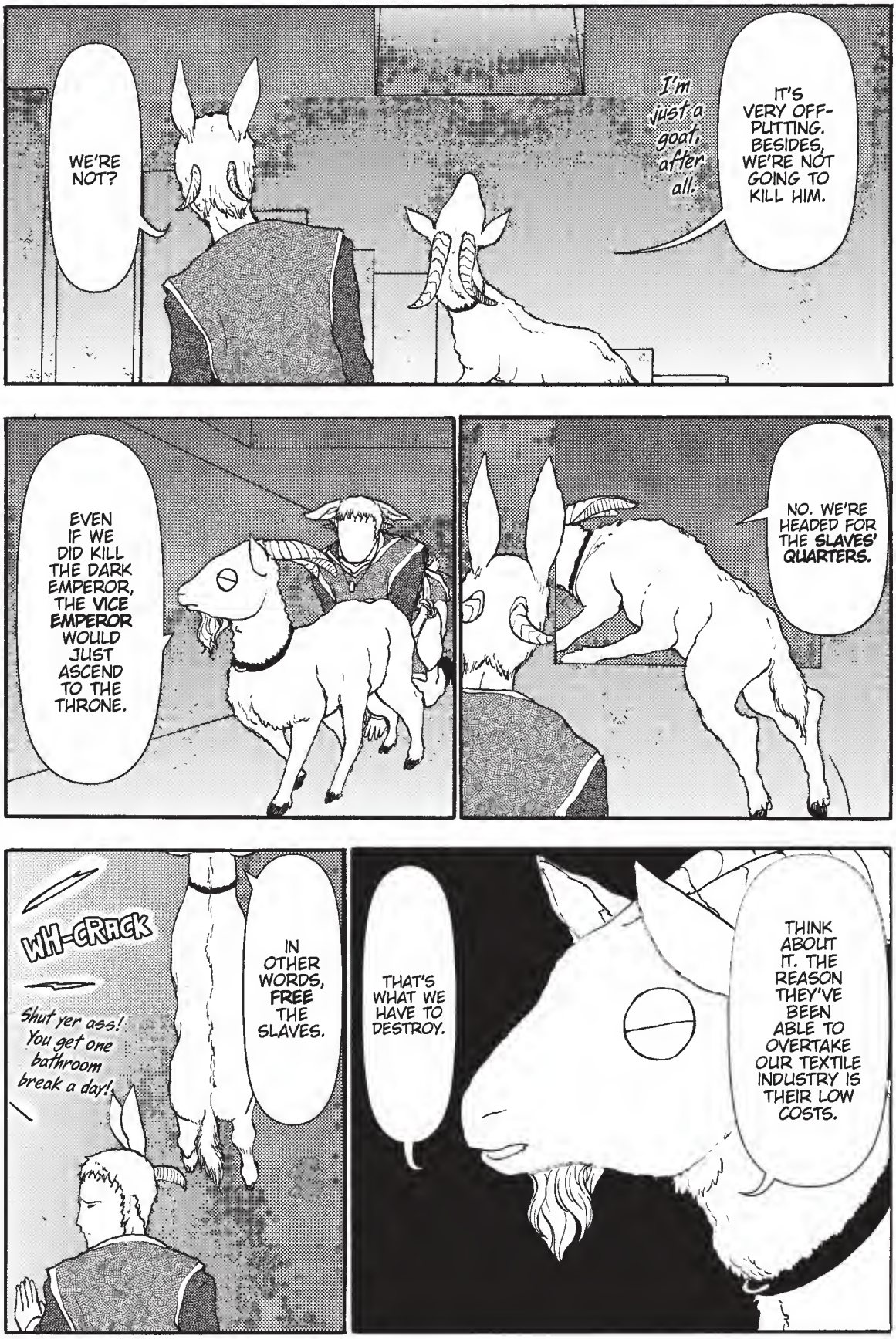

Weekly Achievement Chart
Always be mindful!
Incidents 5W1H Spinach
"Thank you" for letting me work.
Work sets you free.
ON TOP OF THAT, THE QUOTAS WERE WAY TOO HIGH.
Hup.
WHOMP
Hey...


IF YOU EAT THAT MUCH, YOU DON'T NEED OTHER FOOD.
BUT THE IMPERIAL ARMY DIDN'T CARE.
Uhhh... what?!

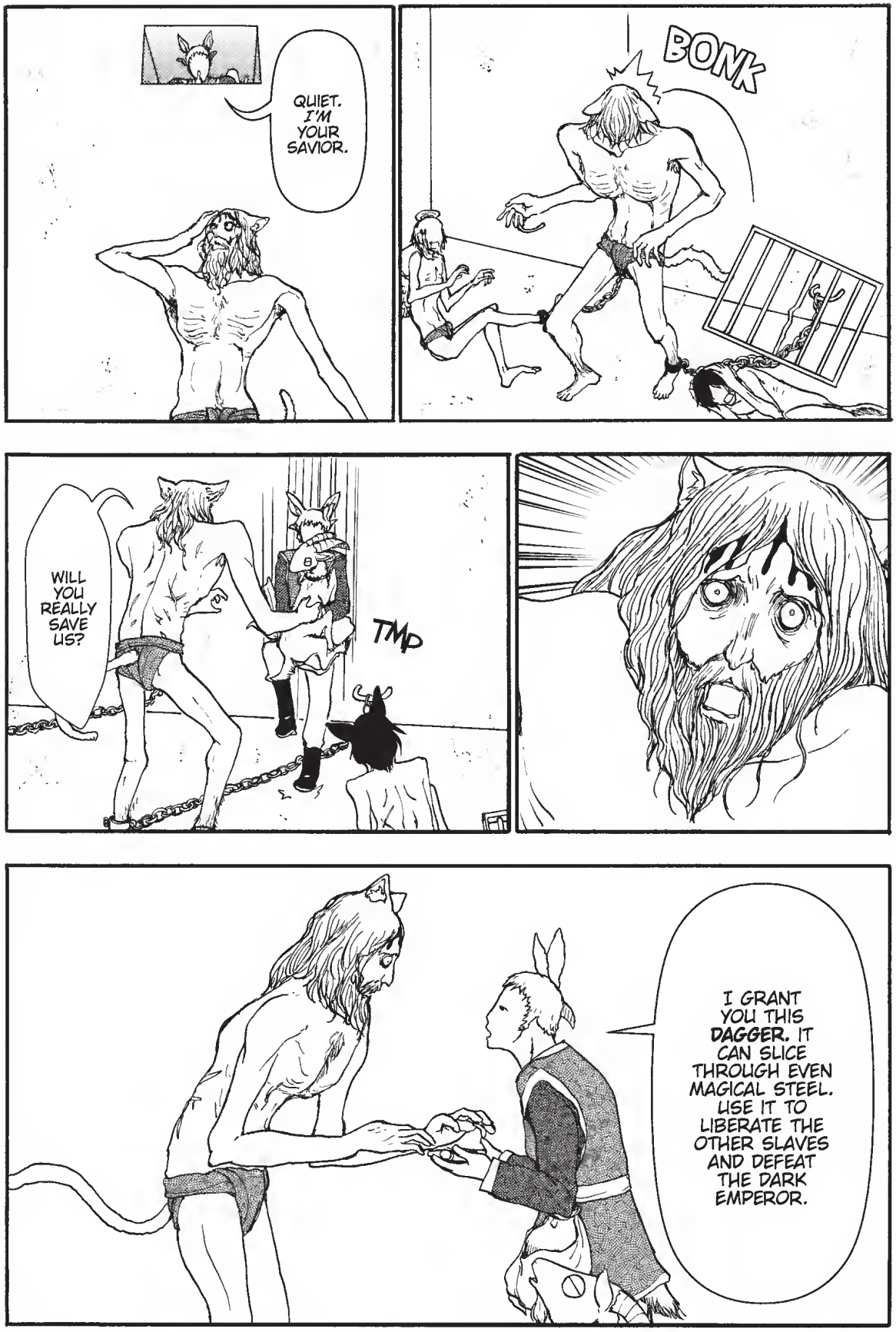
WOW, YOU'RE RUTHLESS.
AS WAS THE WAY I WAS TREATED.

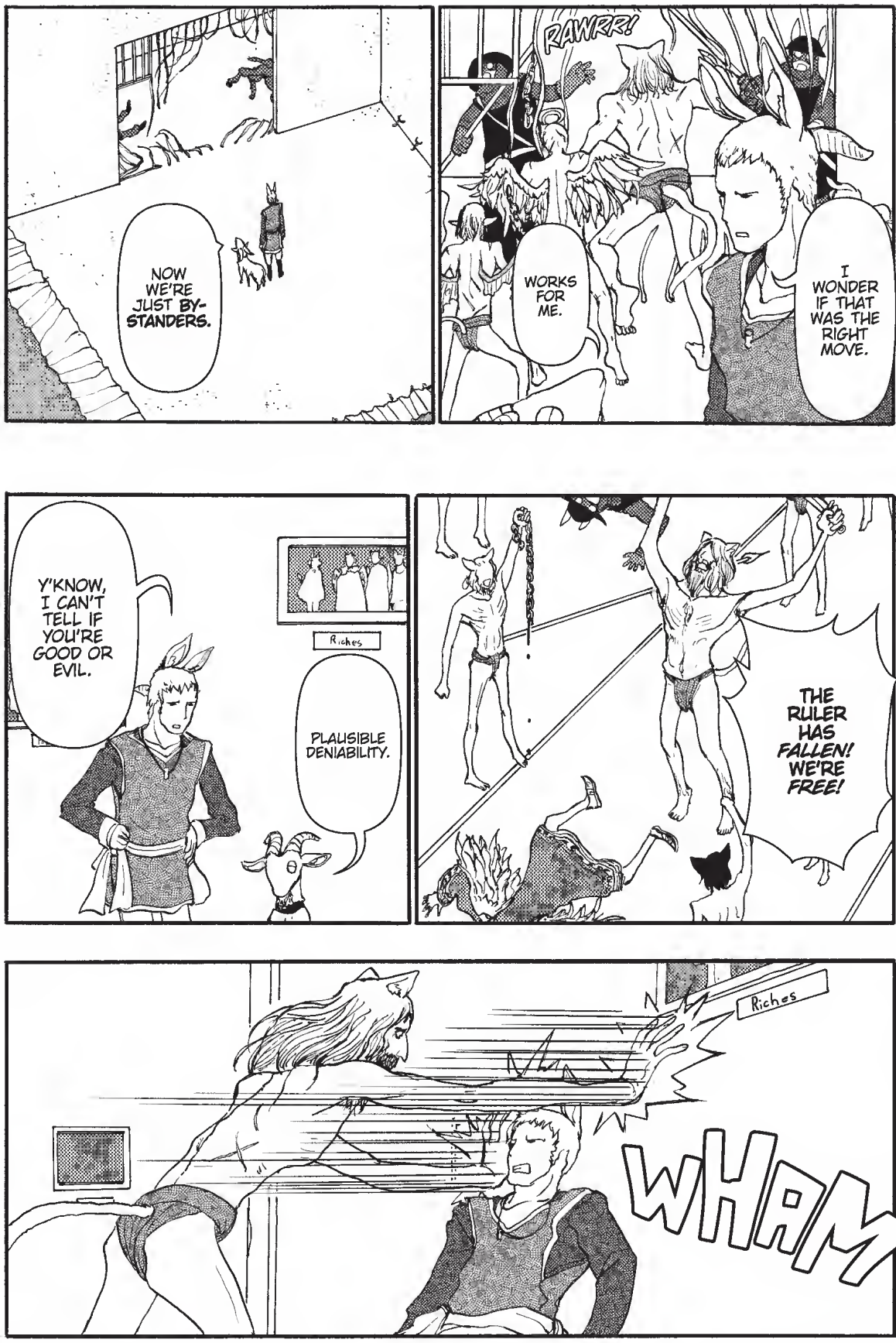

BUT I MEMORIZED A NUMBER OF SECRETS TO SELL LATER.
AND SO I DECIDED TO RUN AWAY.


SO, DID YOU SELL THEM?
'COURSE NOT. TOO TRACEABLE. I DIDN'T WANT TO ENDANGER THE FRIENDS I LEFT BEHIND.
YOU'RE A SURPRISINGLY GOOD GUY.
A FAR CRY FROM A HUMAN.
WHEN WE REACH THE EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS, I'LL RUN 'IM THROUGH WITH THIS.
OUR KINGDOM'S SECRET BLADE, ABLE TO SLICE THROUGH EVEN MAGICAL STEEL-- "THE ROYAL SANDAL."
HAVE YOU ALWAYS BEEN THAT KINDA GUY?
THAT'S THE MISSION, ISN'T IT?
Aren't you a little dutiful for a shepherd?


IT'S VERY OFF-PUTTING. BESIDES, WE'RE NOT GOING TO KILL HIM.
I'm just a goat, after all.
WE'RE NOT?
NO. WE'RE HEADED FOR THE SLAVES' QUARTERS.
EVEN IF WE DID KILL THE DARK EMPEROR, THE VICE EMPEROR WOULD JUST ASCEND TO THE THRONE.
THINK ABOUT IT. THE REASON THEY'VE BEEN ABLE TO OVERTAKE OUR TEXTILE INDUSTRY IS THEIR LOW COSTS.
THAT'S WHAT WE HAVE TO DESTROY.
IN OTHER WORDS, FREE THE SLAVES.
WH-CRACK
Shut yer ass! You get one bathroom break a day!

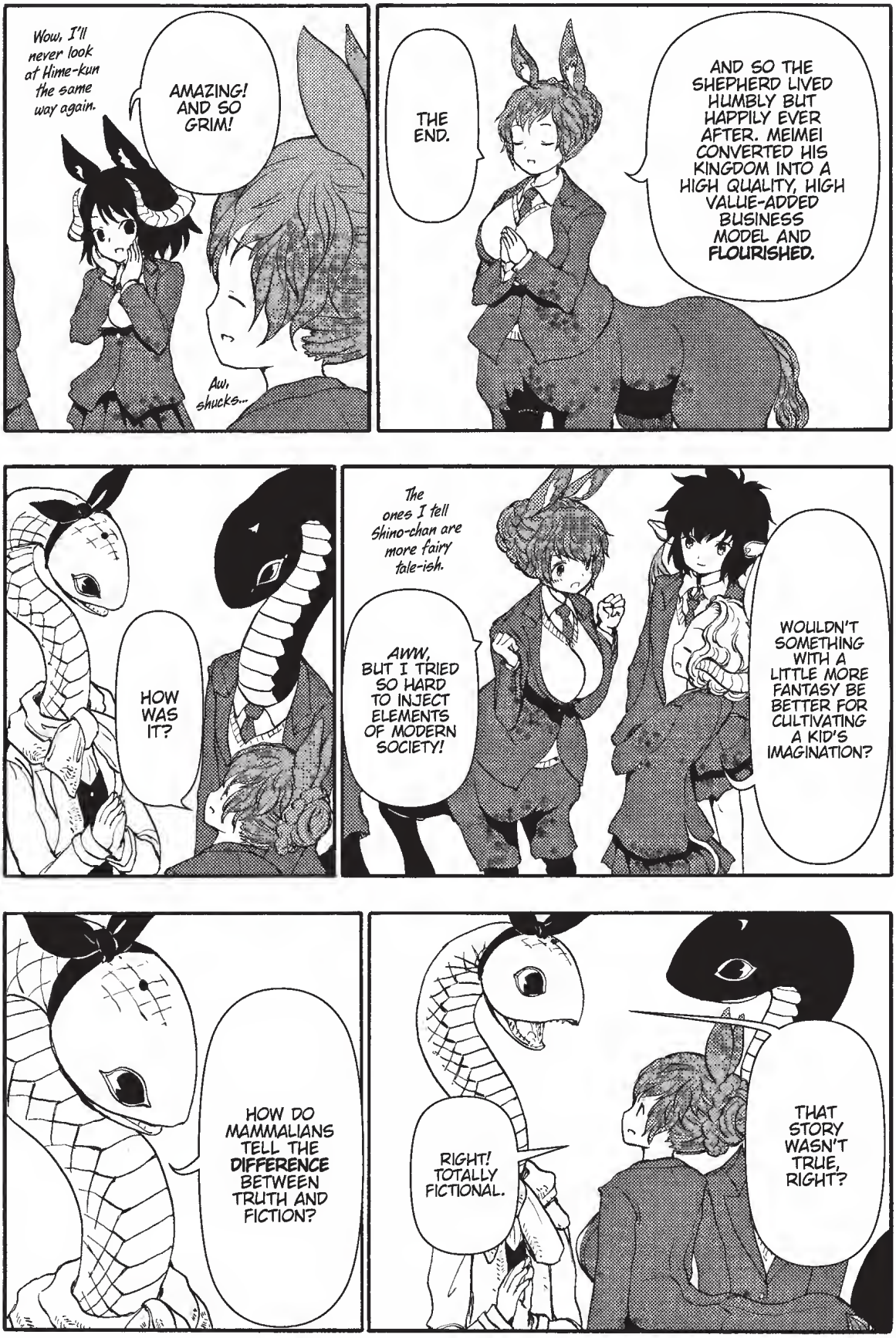
I CAN FEEL IT! I CAN FEEL IT! A SAVIOR IS COMING!
YOU HAVE TO CALM DOWN!
FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, SHUT UP!
We've got our own quotas to worry about, after all.
EH, LET'S IGNORE HIM. IF WE LET HIM CLING TO HIS FALSE HOPE, HE'LL DO MORE WORK THAN SEVERAL MEN COMBINED.
HE'S MAKING A RACKET AGAIN.


QUIET. I'M YOUR SAVIOR.
BONK
WILL YOU REALLY SAVE US?
TMP
I GRANT YOU THIS **DAGGER.** IT CAN SLICE THROUGH EVEN MAGICAL STEEL. USE IT TO LIBERATE THE OTHER SLAVES AND DEFEAT THE DARK EMPEROR.


NOW WE'RE JUST BY-STANDERS.
RAWRR!
WORKS FOR ME.
I WONDER IF THAT WAS THE RIGHT MOVE.
Y'KNOW, I CAN'T TELL IF YOU'RE GOOD OR EVIL.
Riches
PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY.
THE RULER HAS FALLEN! WE'RE FREE!
Riches
WHAM

OUR HOMES HAVE ALREADY BEEN BURNED TO THE GROUND. PLEASE, BECOME OUR NEW KING!
KRICK
SQUEEEEEZE
CRACK
MY SAVIOR, IT'S ALL THANKS TO YOU!
I'M NOT REALLY CUT OUT FOR THAT.
THAT'S MUCH BETTER THAN SOME CRUMMY REWARD.
ACCEPT. DID YOU HEAR HIM? HE SAID KING!
GOLD
OH. NO, I'M...MY DUTY ENDS HERE.
I USED TO KEEP GOATS! I UNDER-STAND GOATISH!
UMM... I'M A GOAT.
THEN WHAT ABOUT YOU?!

JUST KIDDING. AND WHILE I'M KIDDING, I'LL ALSO GIVE YOU A WORD OF ADVICE.
UNDER-STOOD. I'LL DO THAT.
NEXT TIME WE MEET, PLEASE KNEEL AND BOW.
OUR WORKING RELATION-SHIP ENDS HERE.
MAKE THEM THINK YOU'VE USED IT ALL ON THAT. IF YOU STILL HAVE SOME LEFT OVER, USE IT TO HELP THE POOR AND BUY MEDICINE AND HEALTHCARE FOR THE SICK.
INSTEAD, SET ASIDE JUST WHAT YOU NEED TO EKE OUT A HUMBLE LIFE, AND USE THE REST TO HOLD A LAVISH BANQUET FOR ALL THE VILLAGERS. SPLURGE ON THE BANQUET AND LET THAT BE THE **END** OF IT.
BUT THERE'S NO SENSE IN USING THAT MONEY TO TRY AND ASCEND THE SOCIAL LADDER.
WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE, I SUSPECT THE KINGDOM WILL REWARD YOU **HANDSOMELY.**
WE MUST ALL PLAY THE HAND WE'RE DEALT.
GOOD POINT. KIND OF A SHAME YOU WERE BORN A MERE GOAT.
HOWEVER, YOU WILL BE A FOOL WHO IS **LOVED.** YOU'LL LIVE OUT THE REST OF YOUR DAYS IN PEACE, WITHOUT FEAR OF ENVY.
YOU WILL BE NOTED AS THE FOOL SOON PARTED FROM HIS MONEY.


Wow, I'll never look at Hime-kun the same way again.
AMAZING! AND SO GRIM!
Aw, shucks...
THE END.
AND SO THE SHEPHERD LIVED HUMBLY BUT HAPPILY EVER AFTER. MEIMEI CONVERTED HIS KINGDOM INTO A HIGH QUALITY, HIGH VALUE-ADDED BUSINESS MODEL AND FLOURISHED.
HOW WAS IT?
The ones I tell Shino-chan are more fairy tale-ish.
AWW, BUT I TRIED SO HARD TO INJECT ELEMENTS OF MODERN SOCIETY!
WOULDN'T SOMETHING WITH A LITTLE MORE FANTASY BE BETTER FOR CULTIVATING A KID'S IMAGINATION?
HOW DO MAMMALIANS TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUTH AND FICTION?
RIGHT! TOTALLY FICTIONAL.
THAT STORY WASN'T TRUE, RIGHT?

YOU CAN ALSO GO BY THE STORY'S CONSISTENCY WITH REALITY.
IF IT HAS THINGS THAT DON'T EXIST IN REAL LIFE OR EVENTS THAT ARE HIGHLY IMPROBABLE, IT'S LIKELY TO BE MADE UP.
WELL... USUALLY, TRUE STORIES ARE LABELED AS NON-FICTION.
Non-Fiction
SO LIKE... WHAT IF IT'S A MADE-UP STORY THAT COULD BE REALITY?
WHAT IF I SAY IT'S TRUE WHEN IT'S ACTUALLY NOT?
THAT WOULD JUST BE A LIE.
WHICH IS FINE IF IT'S FOR THE SAKE OF THE LISTENER'S FUN, BUT DISHONESTY ISN'T FUN.
I SEEE. THE UNFUN ONES ARE UNFUN.
This is tricky stuff!

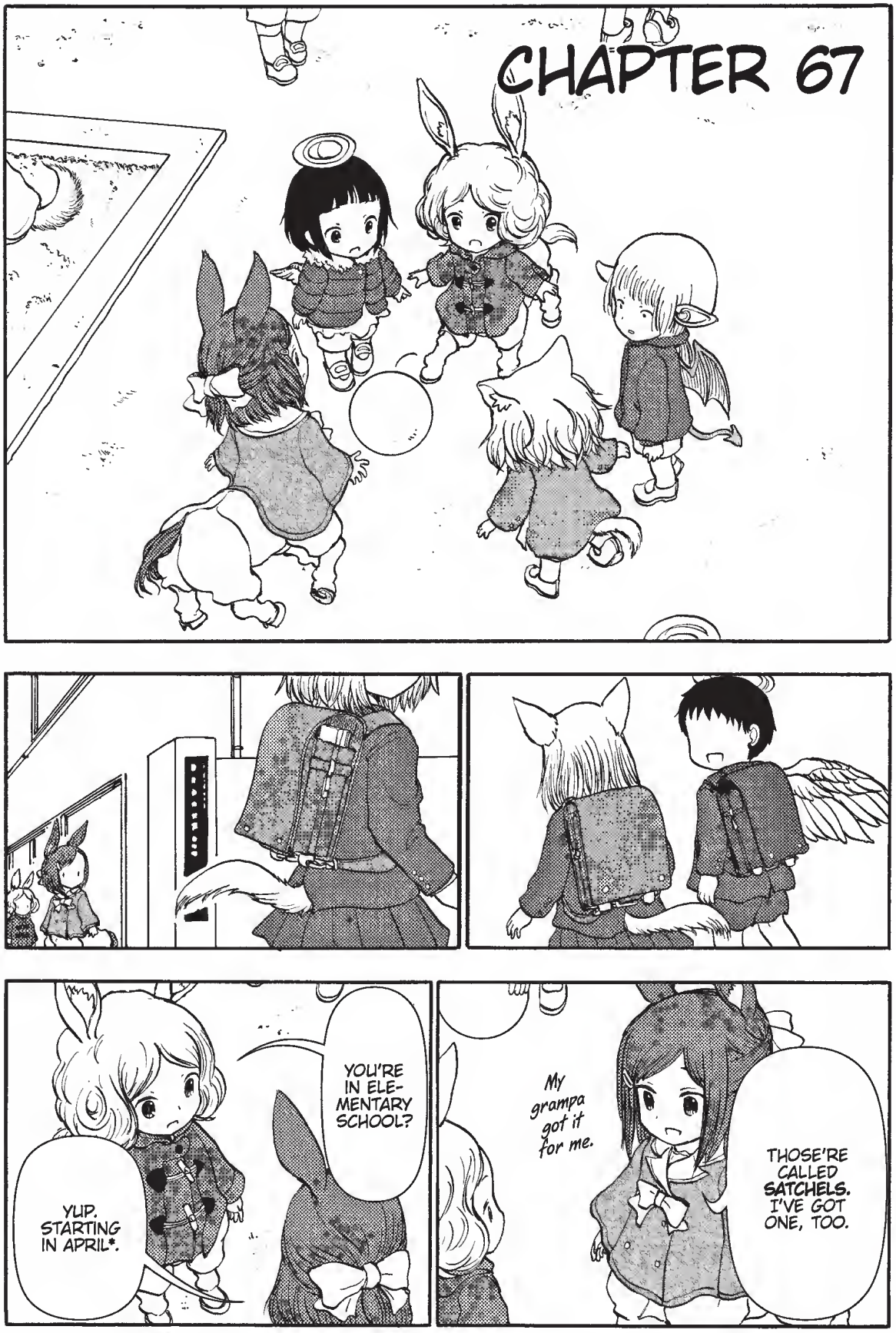
A CentaUr's Life

JAPANESE *YOKAI*
YUUREI (GHOSTS)

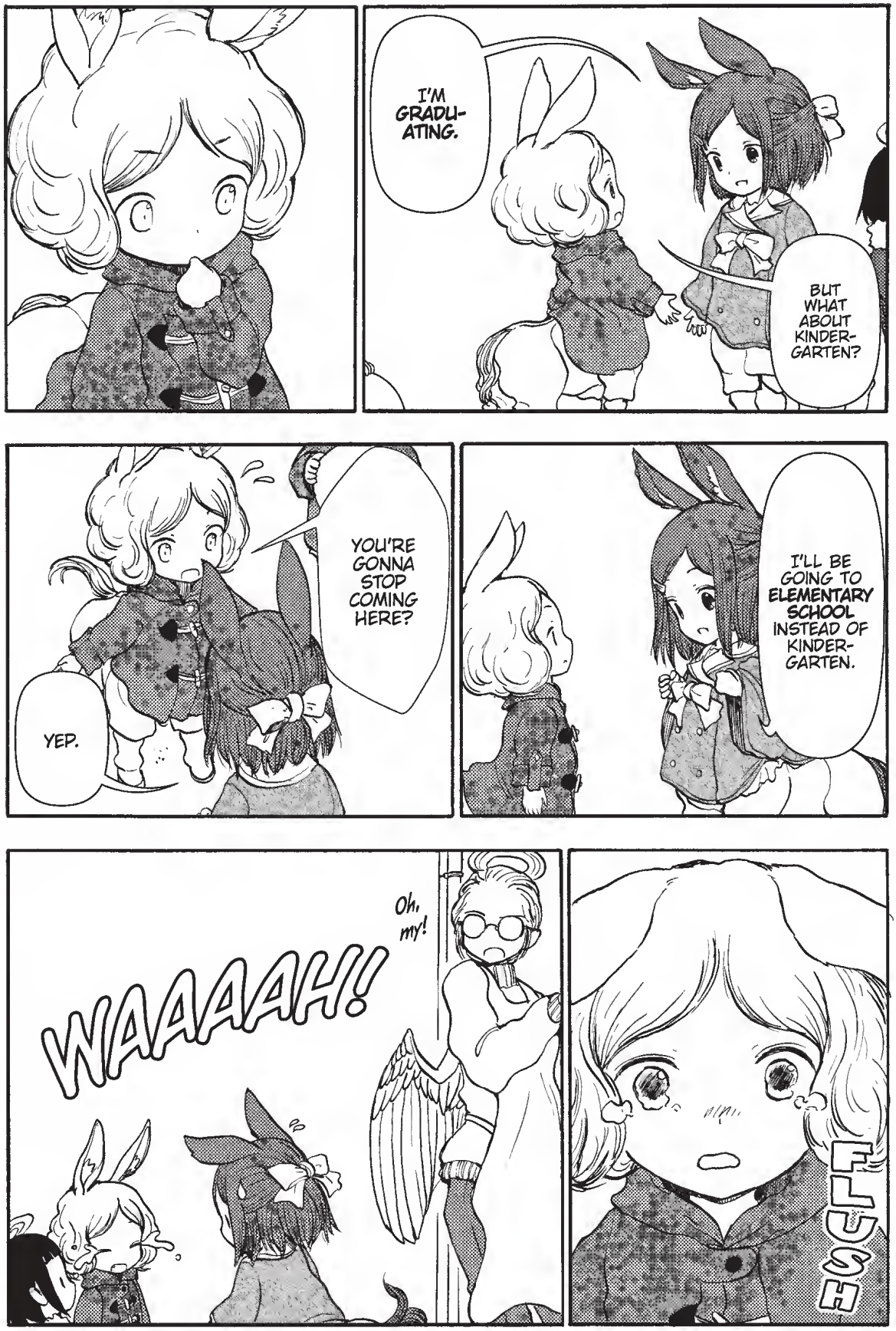
YUUREI ARE APPARITIONS OF THE DEAD. THOUGH THEY WERE ONCE COMMONLY DEPICTED AS LOOKING MUCH LIKE THEY DID IN LIFE, THEY BEGAN TO APPEAR WEARING WHITE BURIAL ROBES AROUND THE MIDDLE OF THE EDO PERIOD. OF COURSE, EVEN IN MODERN TIMES GHOSTS ARE OFTEN SPOTTED DRESSED IN WHITE, ONE-PIECE GOWNS. AS WITH PHYSICAL TRAITS OF OTHER *YOKAI*, IT IS LIKELY THAT ARTISTIC INTERPRETATIONS OF *YUUREI* WITH THEIR FEET TRAILING OFF INTO MIST EVENTUALLY LED TO THAT ASPECT OF THEIR ACCEPTED APPEARANCE. THE ARCHETYPE OF THE FOOTLESS GHOST IS OFTEN USED IN SPOOKY STORIES EVEN NOW.

AS JAPAN'S ISOLATIONISM CAME TO AN END, WESTERN CULTURE AND NEW NOTIONS OF SPIRITUALISM BEGAN TO TRICKLE IN, WHICH AFFECTED THE COUNTRY'S PERCEPTION OF *YUUREI* SIGNIFICANTLY. THE DUALISM OF FLESH AND SPIRIT PREACHED BY GNOSTIC SPIRITUALISM CREATED AN IDEA THAT GHOSTS WERE ACTUAL ENTITIES THAT EXISTED IN THE REAL WORLD AND COULD BE OBSERVED THROUGH CAMERAS AND OTHER MODERN TECHNOLOGY. AS A RESULT, THE FORMERLY VAGUE CONCEPT OF *YUUREI* BECAME SOMETHING PEOPLE COULD PICTURE AND DESCRIBE WITH INCREASING SPECIFICITY AS ACTUAL EXISTING ENTITIES. THE PRODUCT OF THIS WAS A VARIETY OF DISTINCT TYPES OF *YUUREI* THAT NOW APPEAR REGULARLY IN OCCULT FICTION.

THIS SORT OF SPIRITUAL OCCULTISM THAT SUGGESTS THE EXISTENCE OF A HIGHER WORLD SEPARATE FROM OUR OWN IS A TOOL USED BY HERETIC CULTS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THOSE WHO ARE AILING, ALIENATED, AGGRIEVED, OR DISAFFECTED. THIS TREND IS VERY HARMFUL AND CALLS FOR SWIFT ERADICATION. IF YOU SEE ANY SUSPICIOUS CULTIST BEHAVIOR, BE SURE TO IMMEDIATELY ALERT YOUR LOCAL POLICE, THE INTERNAL BUREAU OF SOCIAL PRESERVATION, OR THE IDEOLOGICAL SECURITY BRANCH OF THE NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE. IT IS THE DUTY OF ALL CITIZENS IN A LIBERAL DEMOCRACY.

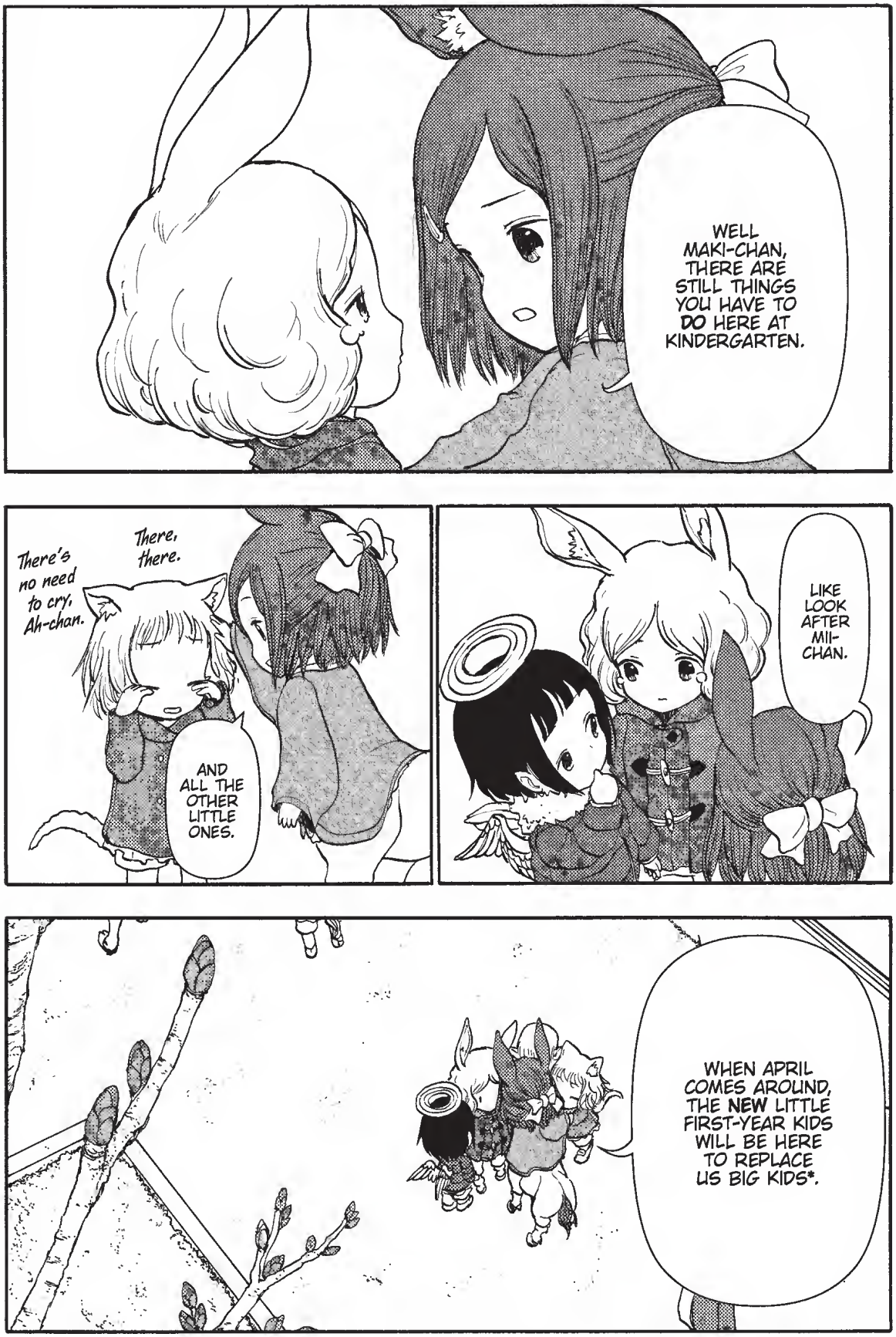

CHAPTER 67
THOSE'RE CALLED SATCHELS. I'VE GOT ONE, TOO.
My grampa got it for me.
YOU'RE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?
YUP. STARTING IN APRIL*.

*The school year starts in April in Japan.


I'M GRADU-ATING.
BUT WHAT ABOUT KINDER-GARTEN?
I'LL BE GOING TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL INSTEAD OF KINDER-GARTEN.
YOU'RE GONNA STOP COMING HERE?
YEP.
FLUSH
Oh, my!
WAAAAH!

IT'S NOT LIKE I'M GOING AWAY. WE CAN STILL PLAY EVERY DAY AFTER SCHOOL.
NOO! I DON'T WANT YOU TO GOOO!
Sympathetic Crying
I'LL GO TO ELE-MENTARY SCHOOL, TOO!
I DON'T CARE!
PLEASE DON'T CRY, MII-CHAN.
No!
No!
No!
MAKI-CHAN, YOU CAN'T GO TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL JUST YET.

WOBBLE
OKAY THEN.
MAKI-CHAN, YOU'RE NOT GOING AWAY ANYWHERE?
Should we say bye-bye?
Er...
BUT SHINO IS GONNA BE GONE!
Nnnggggh
I don't wanna say bye-byyyye!
UMM... NOT SURE WHAT I SHOULD SAY.


WELL MAKI-CHAN, THERE ARE STILL THINGS YOU HAVE TO DO HERE AT KINDERGARTEN.
There, there.
There's no need to cry, Ah-chan.
AND ALL THE OTHER LITTLE ONES.
LIKE LOOK AFTER MII-CHAN.
WHEN APRIL COMES AROUND, THE NEW LITTLE FIRST-YEAR KIDS WILL BE HERE TO REPLACE US BIG KIDS*.

*Japanese kindergarten spans ages 3-5.

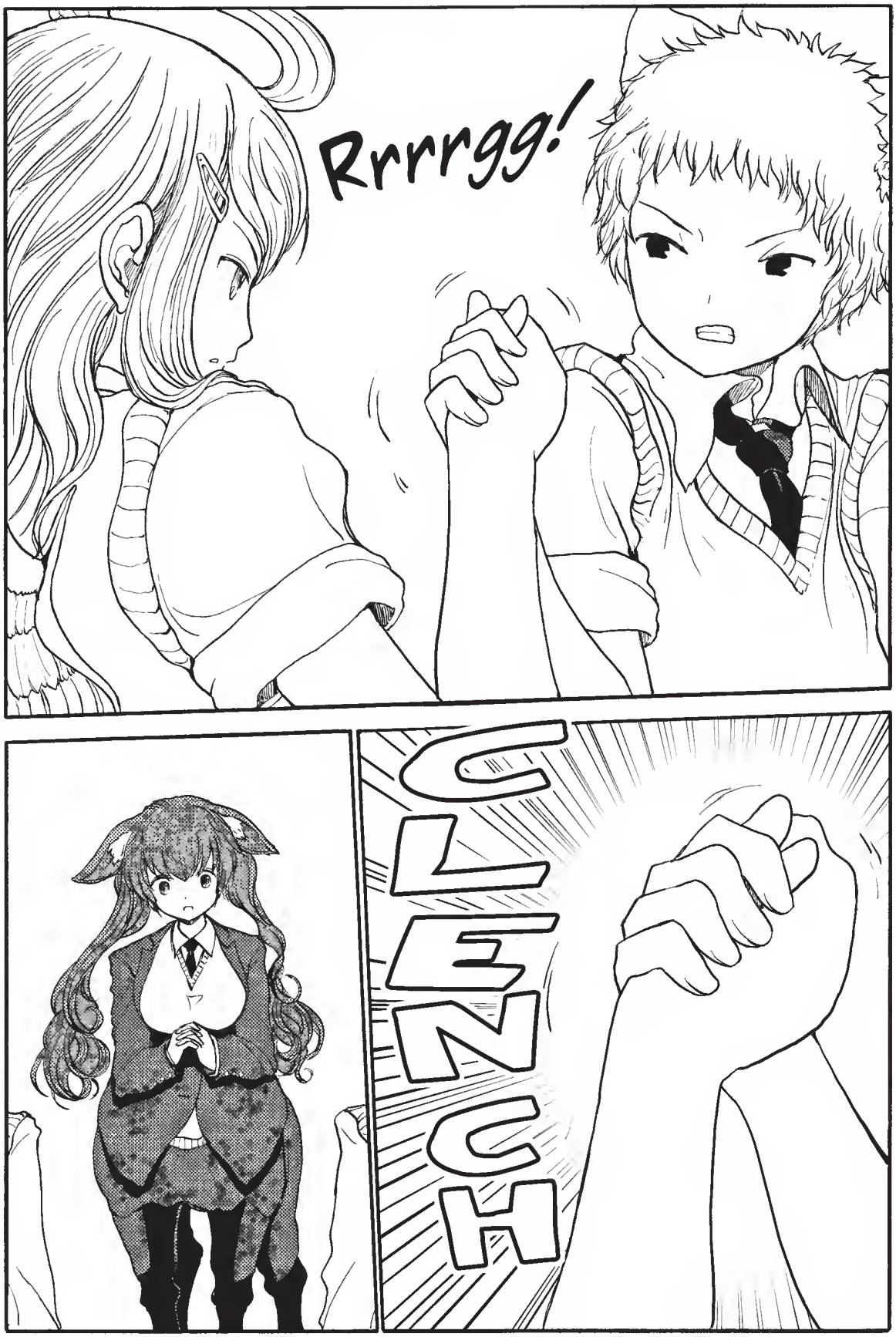
IF YOU CAN DO THAT, THEN YOU'LL GRADUATE AND BECOME AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENT, TOO.
YOU'LL BE THE BIG KID THEN. WILL YOU BE SURE TO LOOK AFTER THEM?
PAT
PAT
Good job!
WHOA... AND SHE'S JUST A KINDER-GARTENER!
She actually convinced her. And with some wise words, to boot.
Now let's get back to playin' ball!

A CentaUr's Life

JAPANESE *YOKAI*
TAMAMO NO MAE

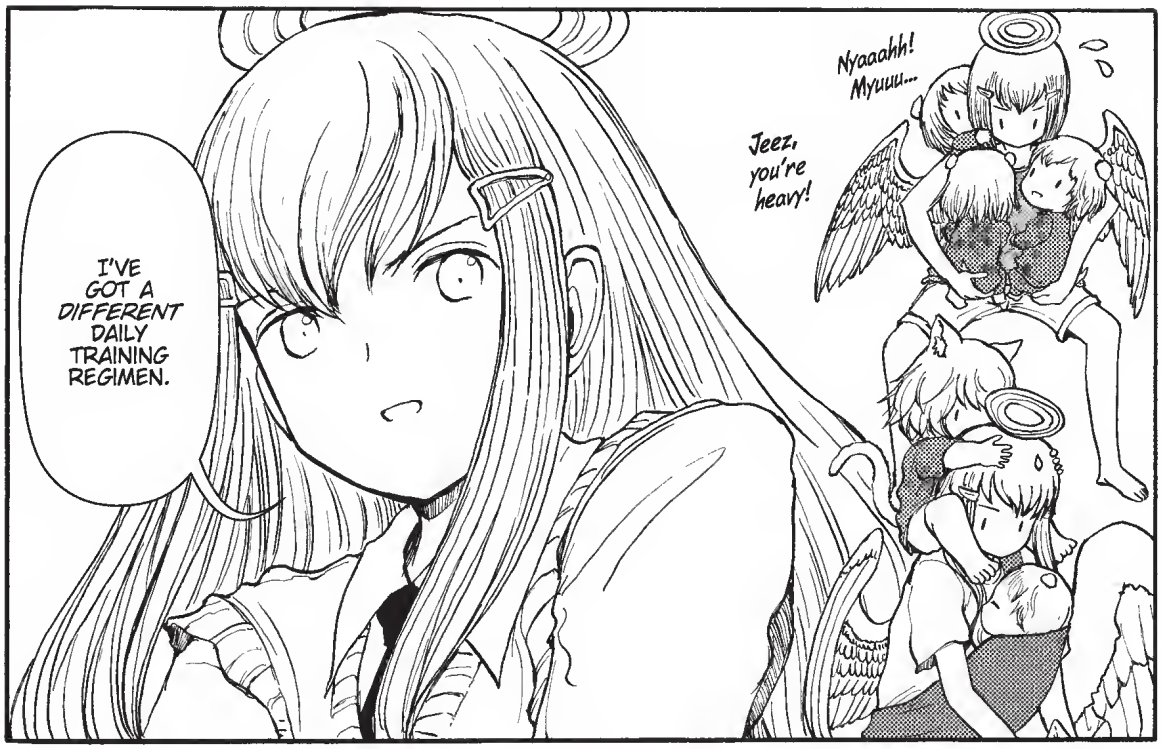
IT IS SAID THAT AFTER THOUSANDS OF YEARS, ANIMALS, PLANTS, AND EVEN OBJECTS WILL EVENTUALLY BECOME *YOKAI*. TAMAMO NO MAE, THE FAMOUS FAVORED COURTESAN OF EMPEROR TOBA, WAS IN FACT A MAGICAL NINE-TAILED *KITSUNE* (FOX SPIRIT) THAT HAD LIVED FOR TEN THOUSAND YEARS. ON THE MAINLAND, THE YOUNG AND INNOCENT-LOOKING TAMAMO NO MAE HAD ALSO PREVIOUSLY BEEN THE FAVORED COURTESAN OF THE TYRANT KING ZHOU OF THE YIN DYNASTY. HER SURPRISING WISDOM AND CHARM CAPTIVATED THE COURT, GIVING HER A GREAT DEAL OF INFLUENCE THAT SHE USED TO LEAD THE NATION TO RUIN. THUS THE ANCIENT DYNASTY, WHICH HAD THRIVED FOR FIVE CENTURIES, MET AN ANTICLIMACTIC DEMISE. IN THE LATER ZHOU DYNASTY, SHE BEGUILED KING YOU INTO FLAUNTING HIS RETAINERS AND MILITARY, PROVOKING AN INVASION FROM FOREIGN AGGRESSORS WHICH RESULTED IN THE KING'S DEATH. IN MAGADHA OF ANCIENT INDIA, TAMAMO NO MAE SEDUCED THE CROWN PRINCE AND MADE HIM CARRY OUT OF A GHASTLY REIGN OF TERROR, BUT HER IDENTITY WAS ULTIMATELY DISCOVERED AND SHE FLED. FOLLOWING THESE EVENTS, IT IS SAID THAT SHE WENT FROM PLACE TO PLACE WREAKING HAVOC, FINALLY ENDING UP IN JAPAN AFTER STEALING AWAY ON AN IMPERIAL ENVOY SHIP.

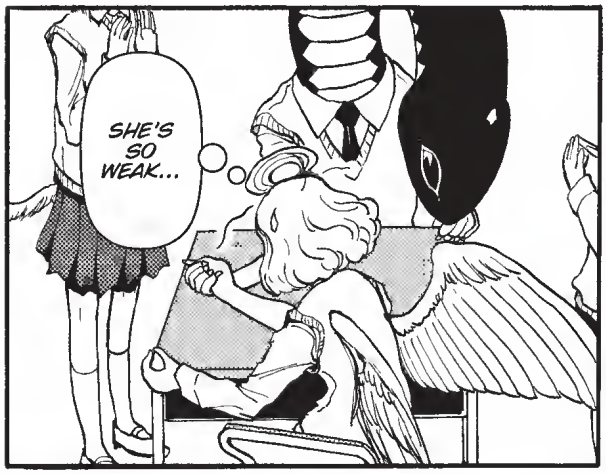
TAMAMO'S CHARMS CONTINUED TO SERVE HER WELL IN THE JAPANESE COURT OF EMPEROR TOBA. FROM THE EMPEROR HIMSELF TO THE LOWEST-RANKING COMMONER, FROM COURTESANS TO SAMURAI, TAMAMO WAS BELOVED, AND HER EVERY WHIM WAS GRANTED. BEFORE LONG, HOWEVER, HER IDENTITY WAS ONCE AGAIN DISCOVERED, THIS TIME BY THE GOVERNMENT'S LEADING DIVINATION SPECIALIST ABE NO SEIMEI, WHO THEN SUCCEEDED IN SEALING HER OFF IN THE ARIAKE SEA. AS SHE WAS SEALED AWAY, TAMAMO CALLED OUT, "ONE DAY I SHALL RETURN," TO WHICH SEIMEI REPLIED, "NOT UNTIL THIS SEA HAS BECOME A GIANT PLOT OF LAND," OR IN OTHER WORDS, NEVER.

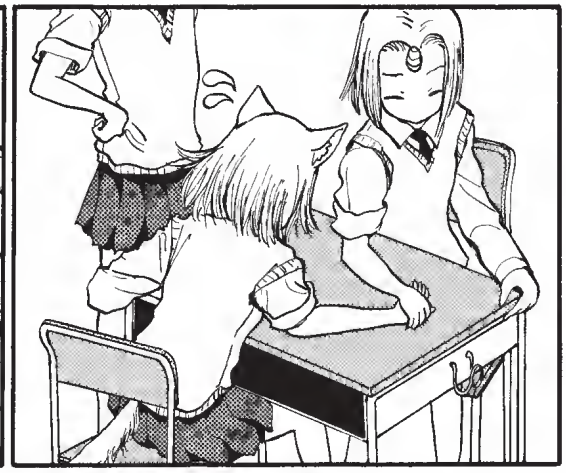

Rrrrgg!
CLENCH

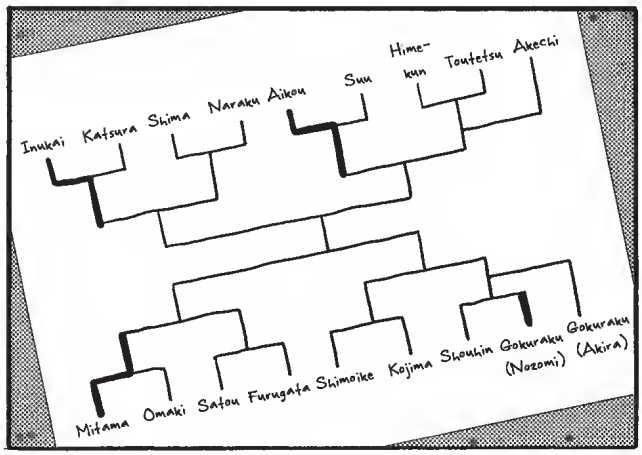
CHAPTER 68

Rrgg!
HEY, THERE'S OUR TOP CONTENDER.
Rrrrngg!
THERE'S NO WAY I'LL LOSE TO SOME-ONE IN THE "GO-HOME" CLUB.
Rrrgg!
HATE TO BREAK IT TO YA, BUT I'VE BEEN WORKING OUT EVERY DAY.
HOW THE HECK ARE YOU SO STRONG?
WHAM
Guh!


I'VE GOT A DIFFERENT DAILY TRAINING REGIMEN.
Jeez, you're heavy!
Nyaaahh! Myuuu...


SHE'S SO WEAK...




Inukai
Katsura
Shima
Naraku
Aikou
Sun
Hime-kun
Toutetsu
Akechi
Mitama
Omaki
Satou
Furugata
Shimoike
Kojima
Shoukin
Gokuraku (Nozomi)
Gokuraku (Akira)

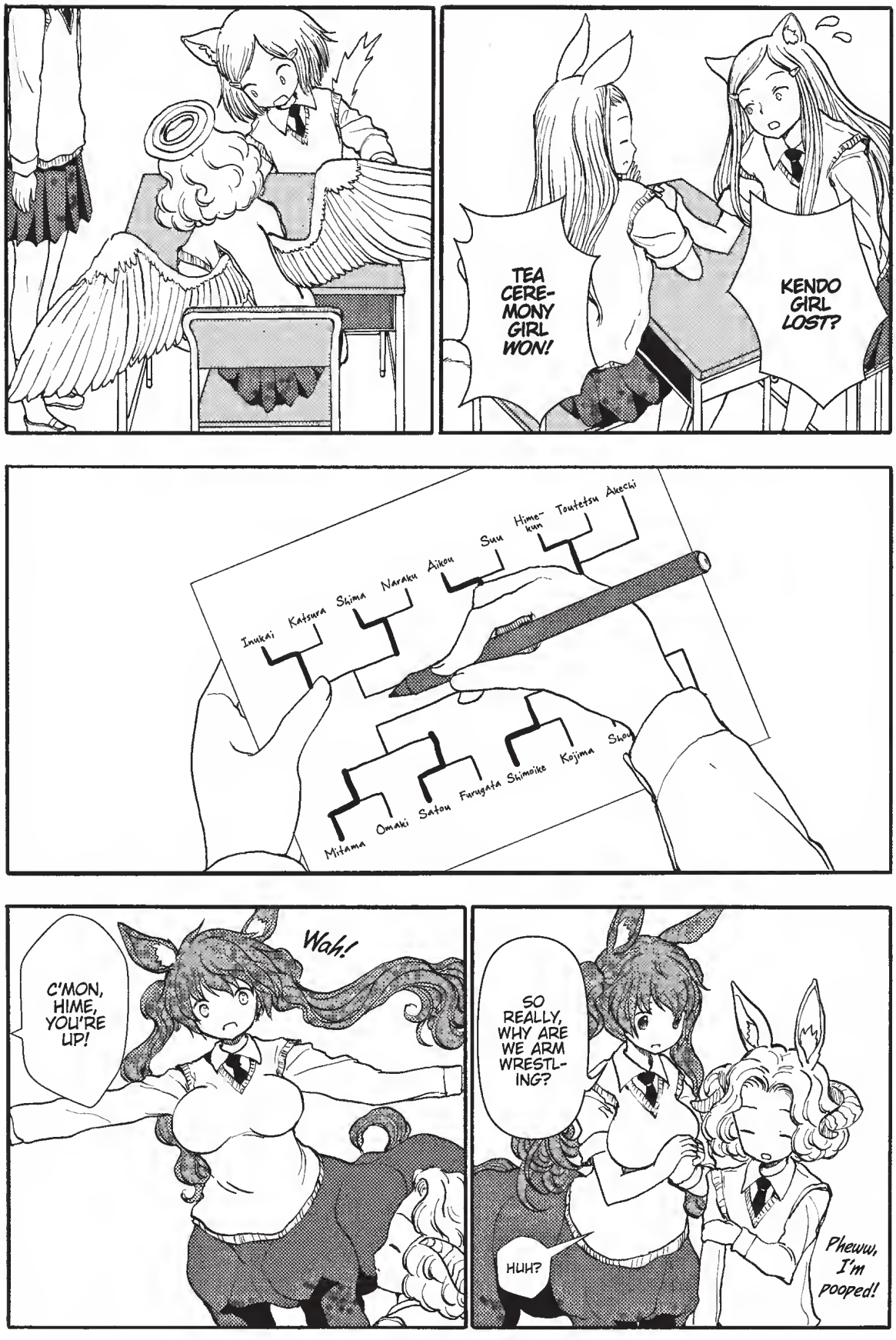
HIME-KUN, YOU'RE UP NEXT.

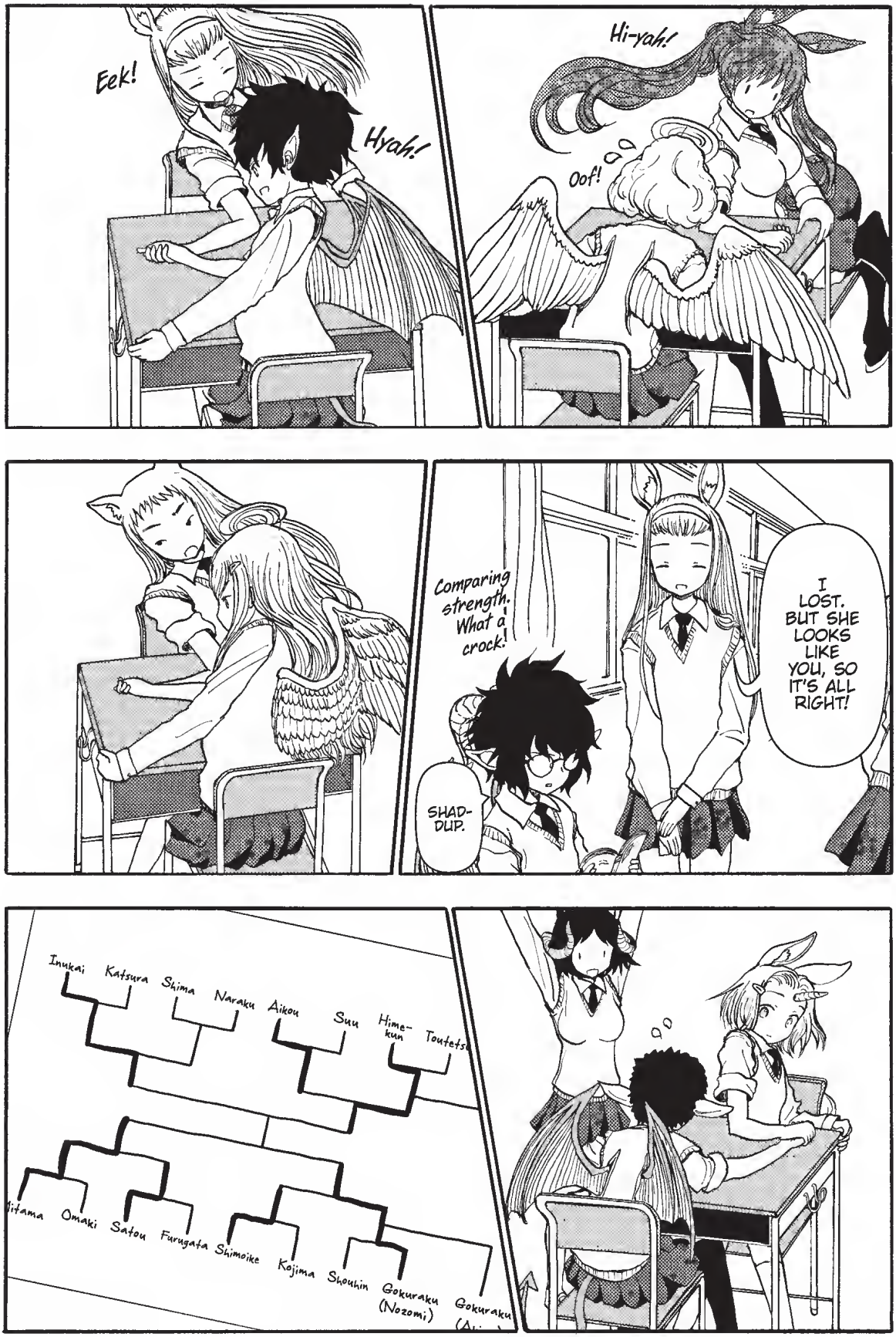
WHY'S SHE SO SERIOUS?
Okay, clasp hands.
Could mess up my grip.
HER HANDS ARE BIGGER THAN I THOUGHT.
FUKU-CHAN IS STRONG, YO. SHE'S ONE OF THE TOP FIVE SHOT-PUTTERS IN THE WHOLE PREFECTURE.
HM. MAYBE IT WILL BE HIME-KUN.
GO!
ARE YOU READY? OKAY THEN...

That's Hime for ya! Powerful as a gorilla.
Urrgg!
Huff...
Urrg!
OOPSIE, GUESS I LOST!
WHAP
But I...!
HEY! DON'T LET ME WIN!
Wha...?
DO-OVER.
THAT ROUND WAS VOID.

Hehe, good idea.
CH... CHECK?
WITH THE HANDS-ON METHOD, BABE!
LET'S SAY THAT IF HIME-KUN LOSES, WE GET TO CHECK WHETHER THOSE BOOBS ARE REAL.
OKAY, ONE MORE TIME.
THEY ARE REAL.
Whoooa!
You okay?
TIP
WHAP

GAH! LEAVE IT ON!
WELL, A DEAL'S A DEAL. DO AS YOU WILL.
I lost... after all that training...
URK ...!
Urrrg...
AND YOU'RE NOT?
YOU CALL THIS A GOOD MATCH? YOU'RE SO... WEAK.
We don't care about yours.
O... oh.
SH... SHUT UP, YOU... BRUTE...
If you just helped around the house a little...
AKIRA'S GOT GOOD REFLEXES, BUT NO MUSCLE AT ALL. SEE?

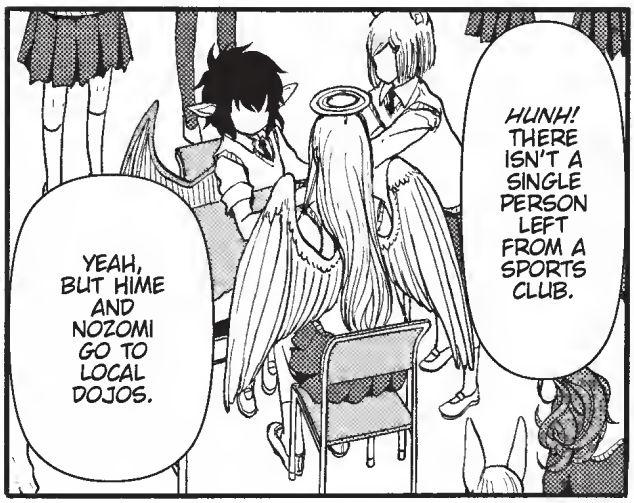

TEA CERE-MONY GIRL WON!
KENDO GIRL LOST?
Inukai
Katsura
Shima
Naraku
Aikou
Suu
Hime-kun
Toufetsu
Akechi
Mitama
Omaki
Satou
Furugata
Shimoike
Kojima
Shou
C'MON, HIME, YOU'RE UP!
Wah!
SO REALLY, WHY ARE WE ARM WRESTL-ING?
HUH?
Phewww, I'm pooped!


Eek!
Hyah!
Hi-yah!
Oof!
Comparing strength. What a crock!
I LOST. BUT SHE LOOKS LIKE YOU, SO IT'S ALL RIGHT!
SHAD-DUP.
Inukai
Katsura
Shima
Naraku
Aikou
Suu
Hime-kun
Toutets
Jitama
Omaki
Satou
Furugata
Shimoike
Kojima
Shouhin
Gokuraku (Nozomi)
Gokuraku

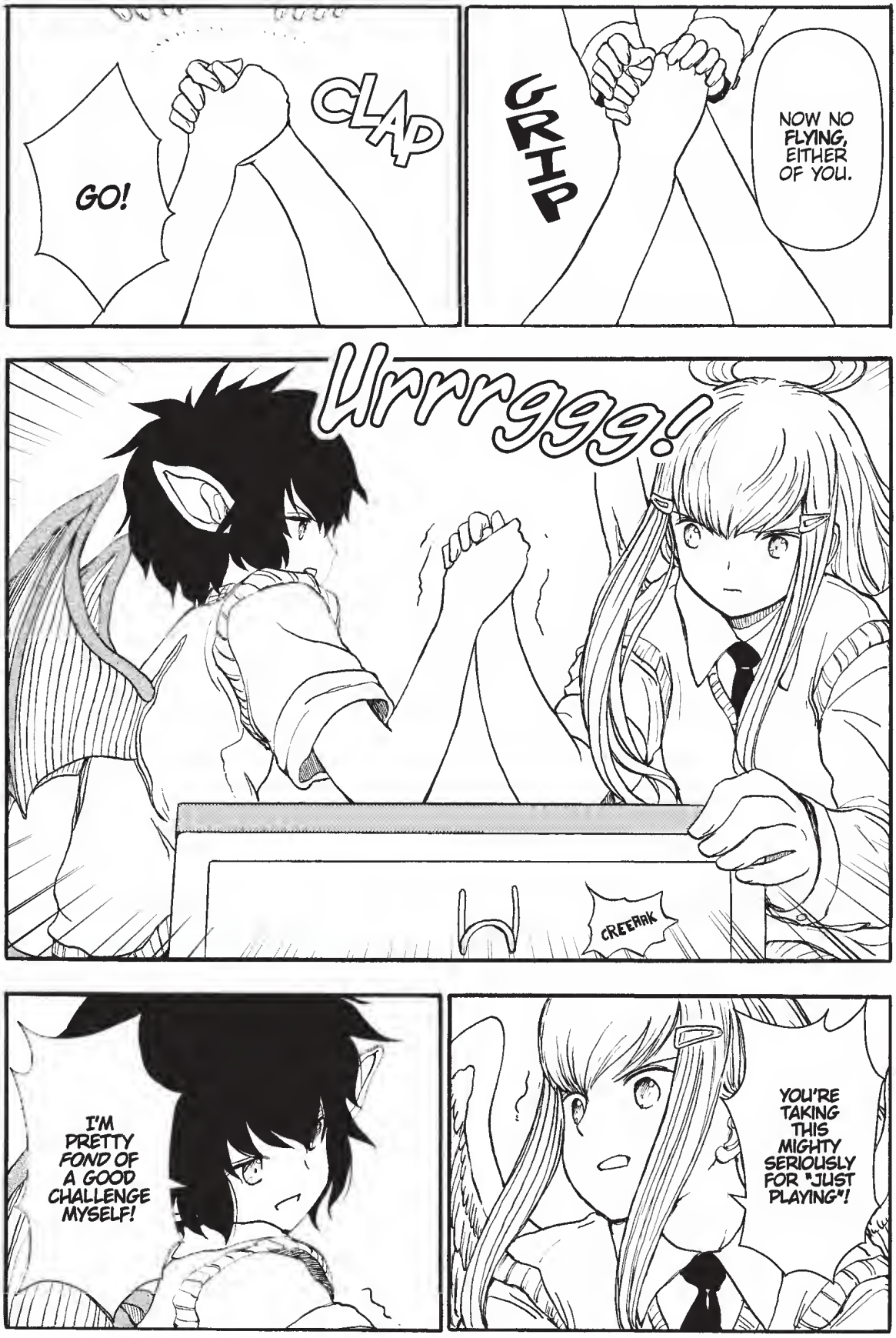
BEST4!
Wh... wh...?
She's not one of 'em.
Way to go, Michi!

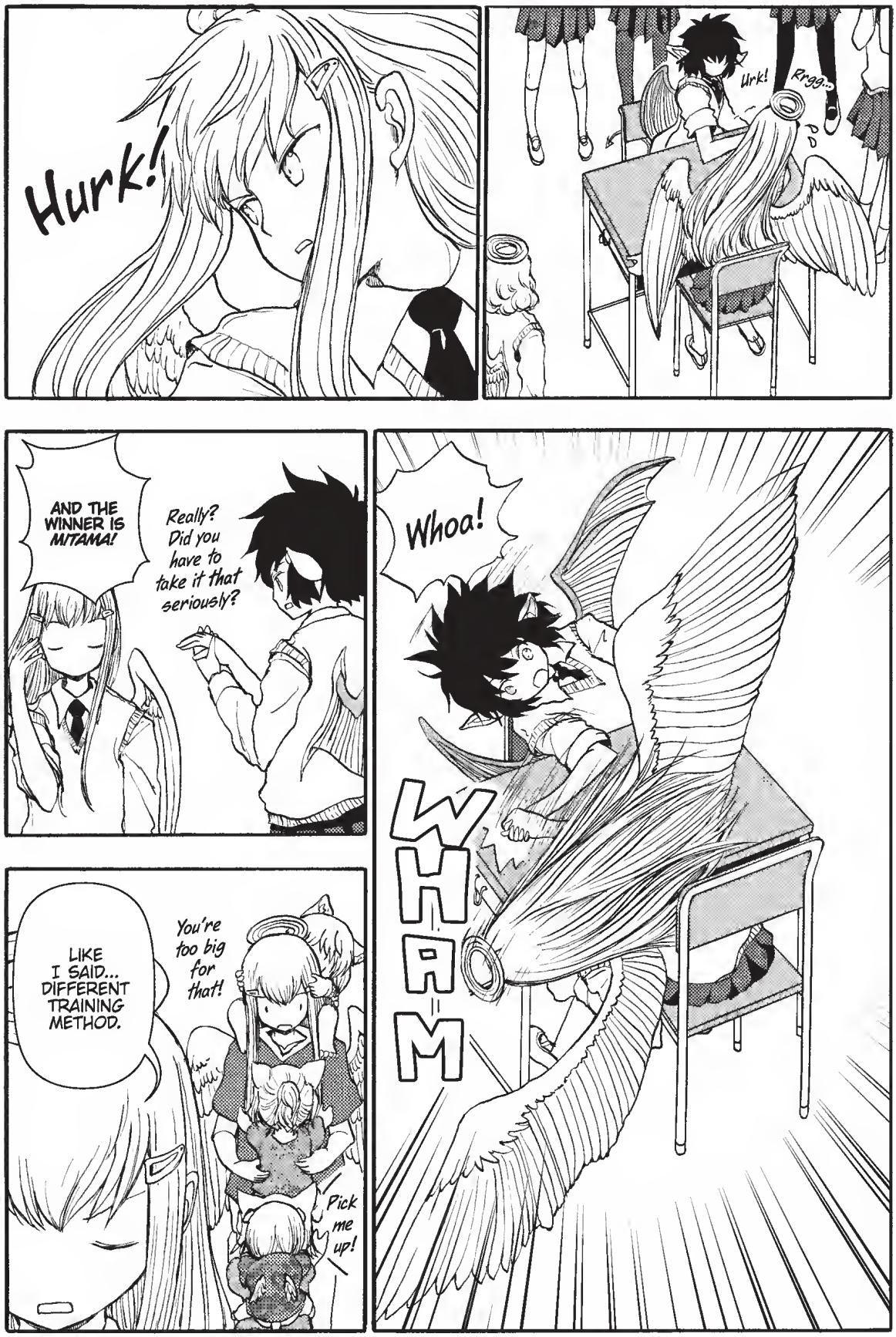
We're just playing.
COME TO THINK OF IT, YOU ALWAYS GET THIS SERIOUS WHEN SOMEONE CHALLENGES YOU.

WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER A LONG TIME, MY DEAR.
BUT THE TIME HAS COME TO SETTLE THE SCORE.


HUNH! THERE ISN'T A SINGLE PERSON LEFT FROM A SPORTS CLUB.
YEAH, BUT HIME AND NOZOMI GO TO LOCAL DOJOS.

SOMETHING WRONG?
UM, WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

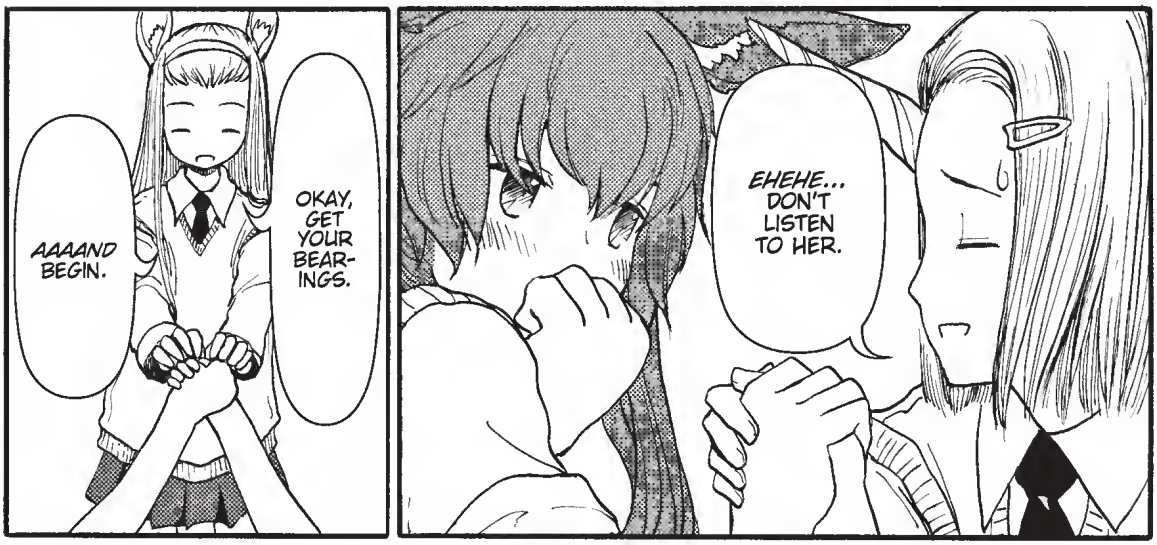

GO!
CLAP
GRIP
NOW NO FLYING, EITHER OF YOU.
Urrrggg!
CREEAAK
I'M PRETTY FOND OF A GOOD CHALLENGE MYSELF!
YOU'RE TAKING THIS MIGHTY SERIOUSLY FOR "JUST PLAYING"!

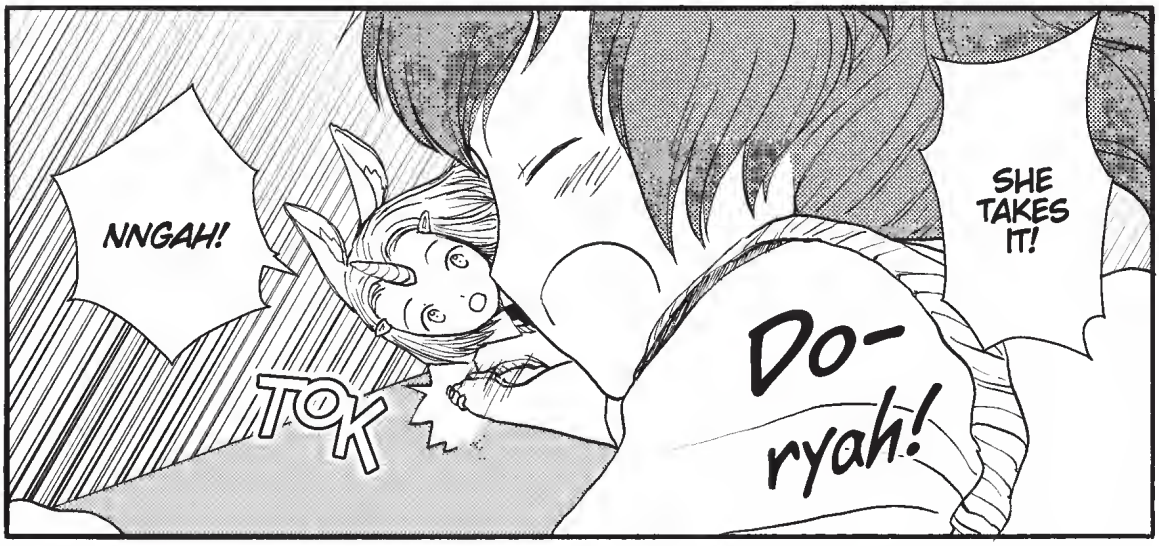

Hurk!
Urk!
R-rgg...
AND THE WINNER IS MITAMA!
Really? Did you have to take it that seriously?
Whoa!
WHAM
LIKE I SAID... DIFFERENT TRAINING METHOD.
You're too big for that!
Pick me up!

NEXT UP IS INUKAI AND HIME.
Not that she is a mother.
THEY SAY MOTHERS ARE A STRONG BREED.
LOOKS LIKE CHILD REARING BEATS KARATE.
WELL, SHE'S TALL. PLUS, SHE DID SPORTS BACK IN JUNIOR HIGH.
HIME IS ONE THING, BUT HOW COME INUKAI'S SO STRONG?
READY?
Too much of a weight difference.
YOU THINK SO?
I DON'T THINK WE NEED TO BOTHER HAVING A MATCH, TO BE HONEST.
LOVE?
BECAUSE OF LOVE.
I'LL TELL YOU WHY.

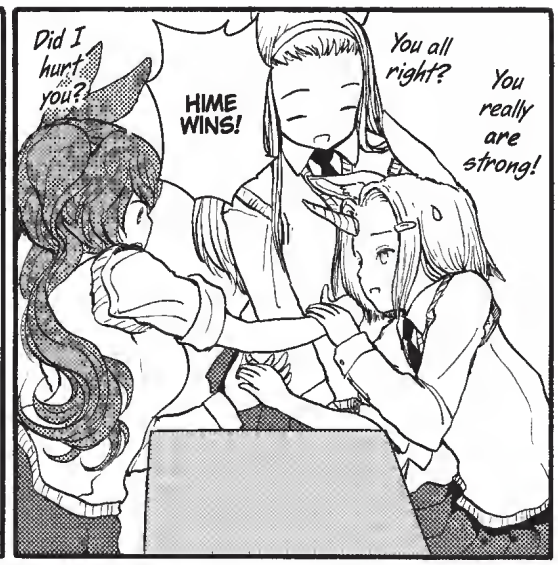
So scandalous!
Besides, how're two girls gonna do that?
YOU'RE CRUDE, Y'KNOW THAT?
GEE, GOOD GUESS.
TRAIN BENTO? OH, LIKE 'CUZ THEY GET BENTOS ON THE TRAIN AFTER SCHOOL?
LEMME GUESS. SHE'S BUFF FROM LOVING YOU "TRAIN BENTO-STYLE" EVERY DAY?

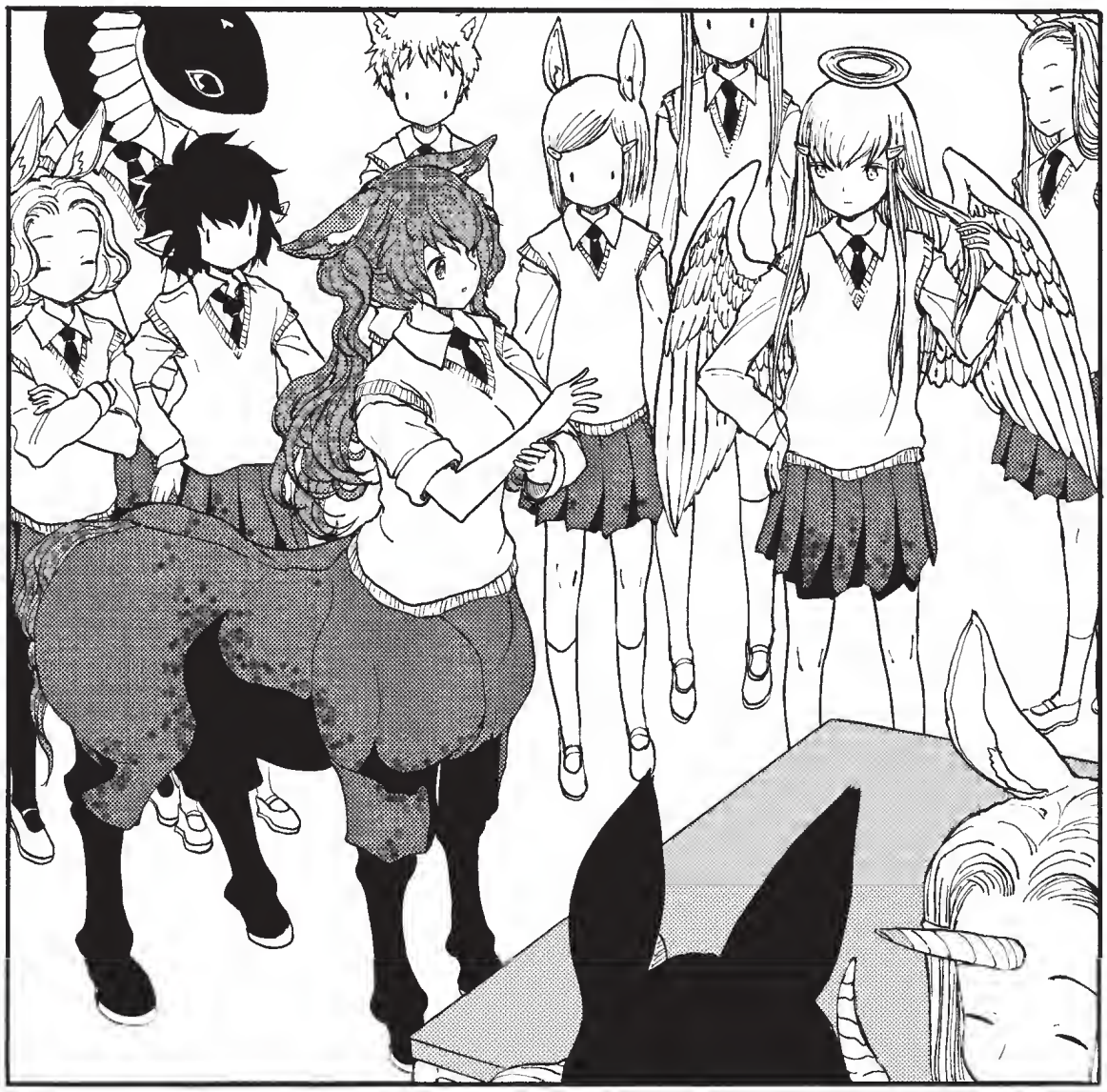
↑ *That is **not** what it means.*



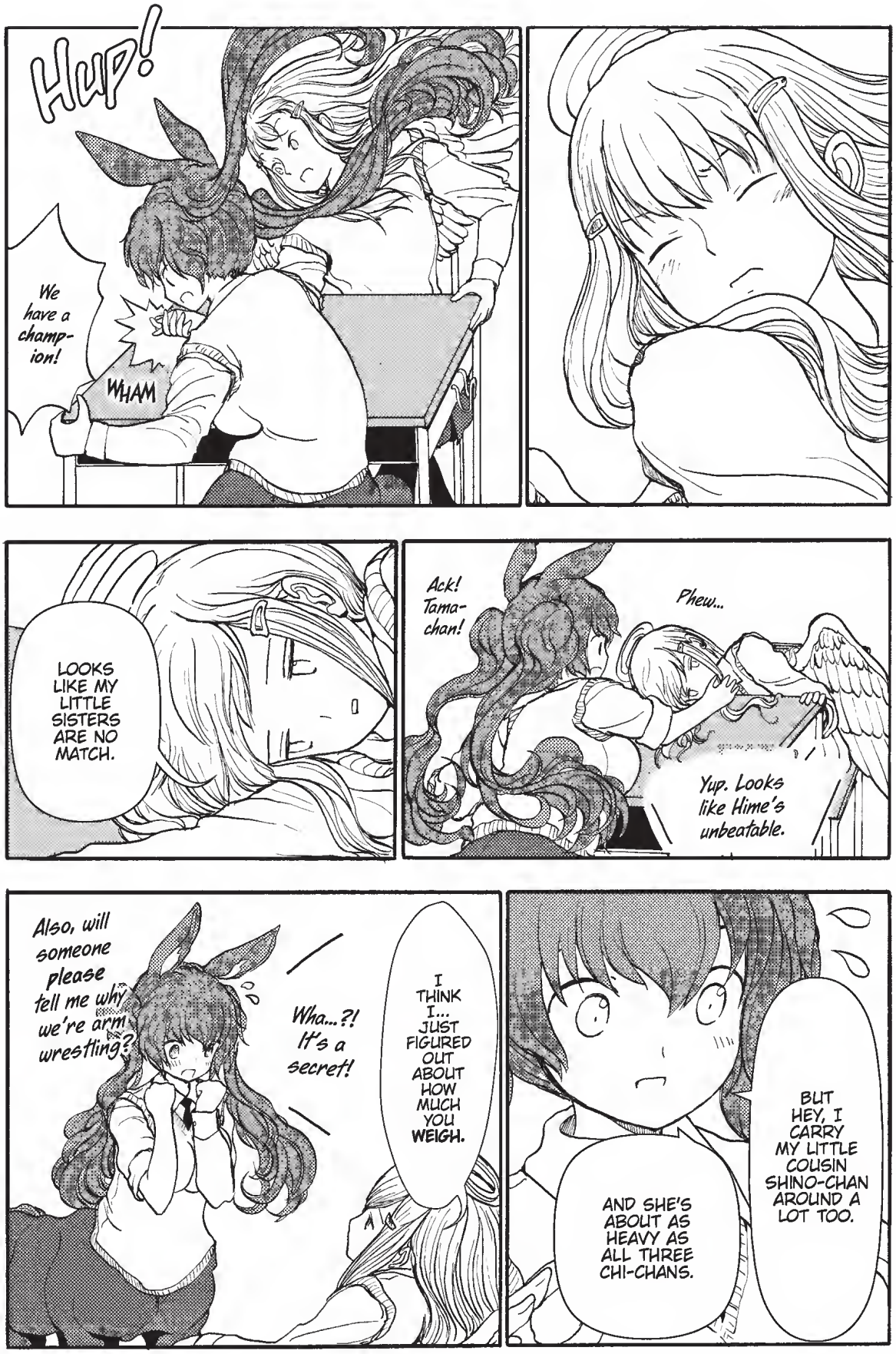


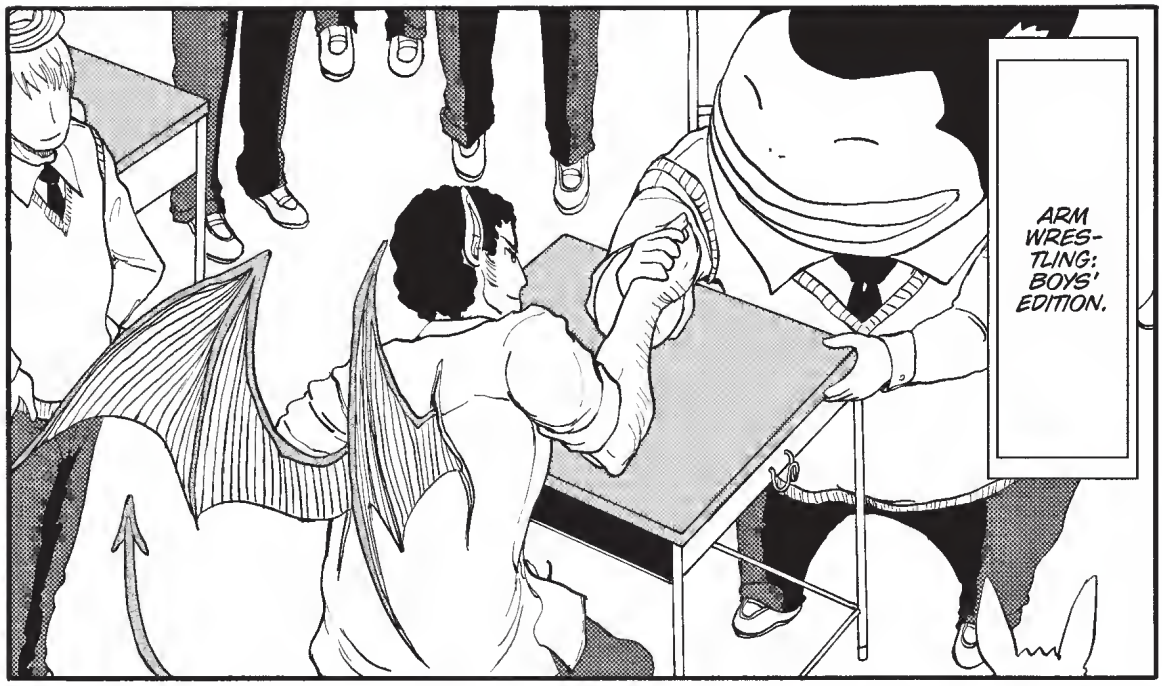
LOOKS LIKE THE "LOVER" LOST.
GUESS I DIDN'T GIVE HER ENOUGH ENCOURAGE-MENT.
IF YOU GIVE HER TOO MUCH, SHE'LL END UP A DUNCE.

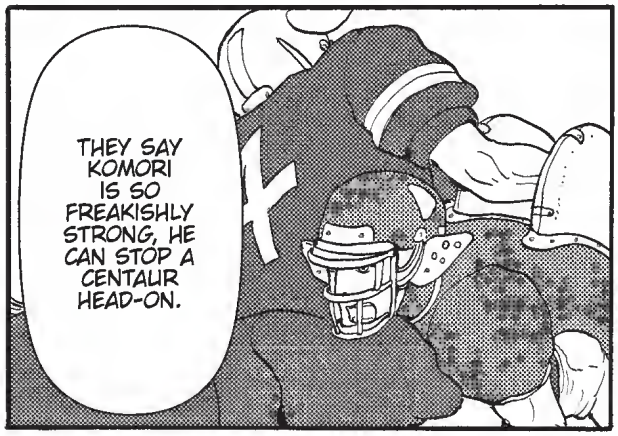

Did I hurt you?
HIME WINS!
You all right?
You really are strong!



NEED A SHORT BREAK?
OH, I'M GOOD TO GO.
BUT, WHY ARE WE ARM WRESTLING, EXACTLY?
Feelin' confident, huh?
THEN LET'S DO THIS.
YOU BOTH GOOD?
BEGIN!
JUST SO YOU KNOW, I DON'T LOSE.
TAMA-CHAN, YOU'RE A LITTLE SCARY.


HUP!
We have a champ-ion!
WHAM
LOOKS LIKE MY LITTLE SISTERS ARE NO MATCH.
Ack! Tama-chan!
Phew...
Yup. Looks like Hime's unbeatable.
Also, will someone please tell me why we're arm wrestling?
Wha...?! It's a secret!
I THINK I... JUST FIGURED OUT ABOUT HOW MUCH YOU WEIGH.
BUT HEY, I CARRY MY LITTLE COUSIN SHINO-CHAN AROUND A LOT TOO.
AND SHE'S ABOUT AS HEAVY AS ALL THREE CHI-CHANS.

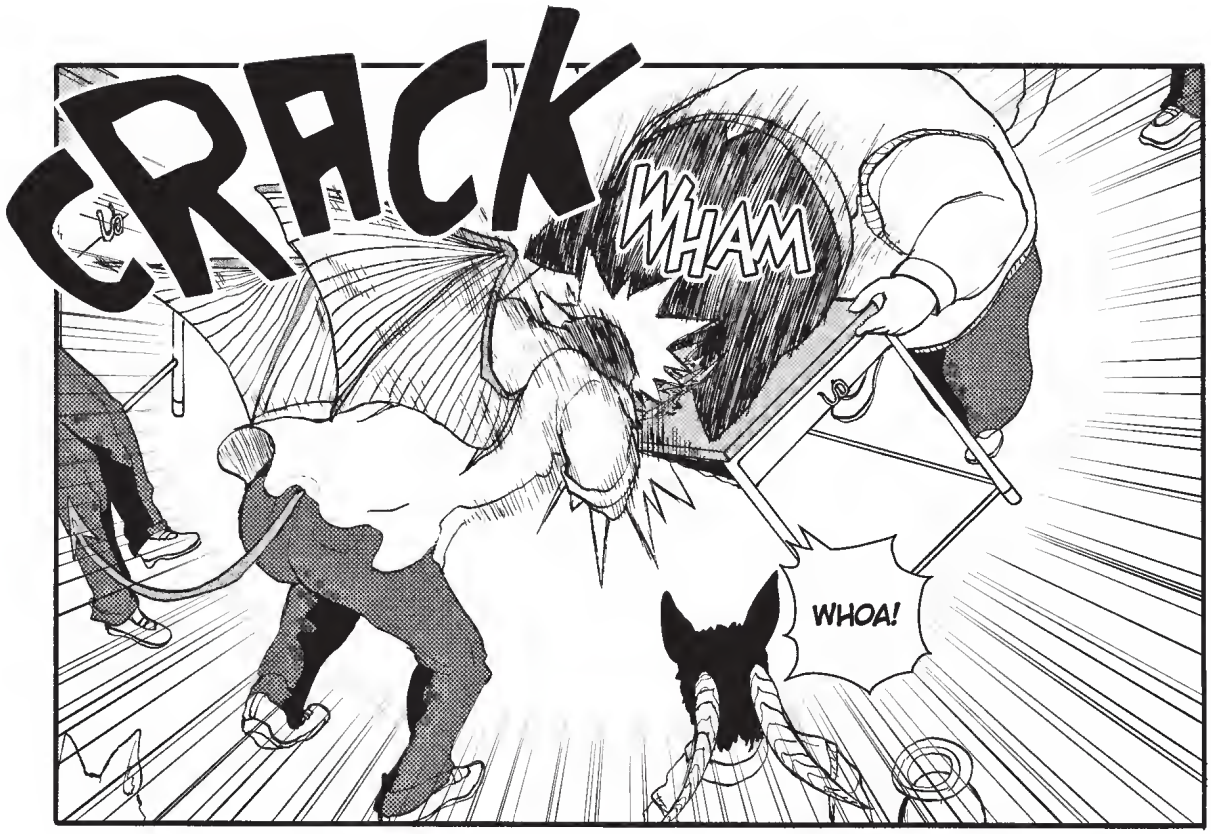

ARM WRES-TLING: BOYS' EDITION.

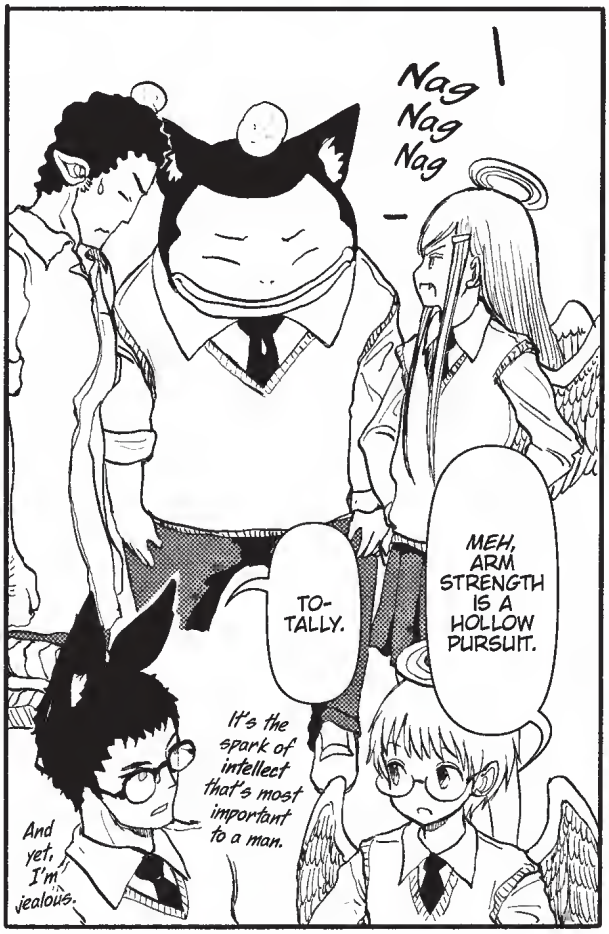

THEY SAY KOMORI IS SO FREAKISHLY STRONG, HE CAN STOP A CENTAUR HEAD-ON.

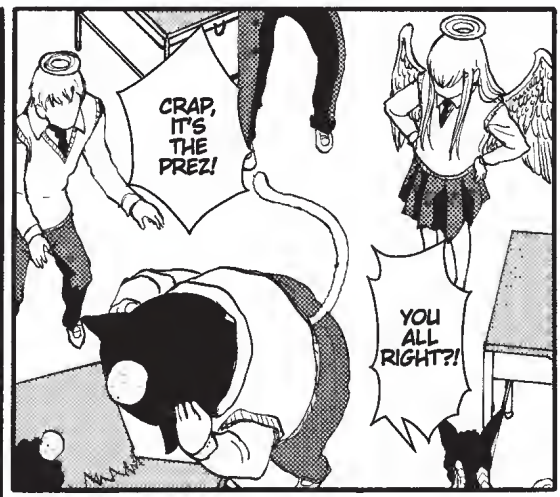
GUESS THIS WAS INEVITABLE.

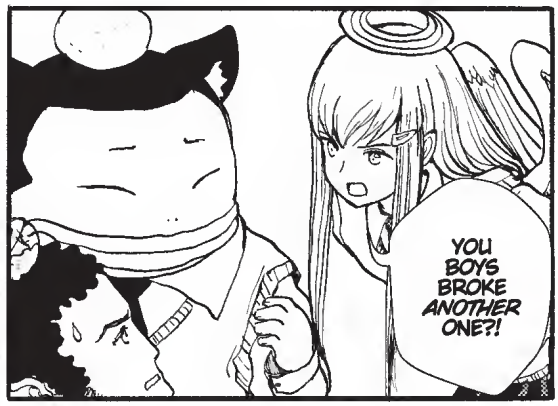
GO!

ARRIGHT, GO TIME.
READY?

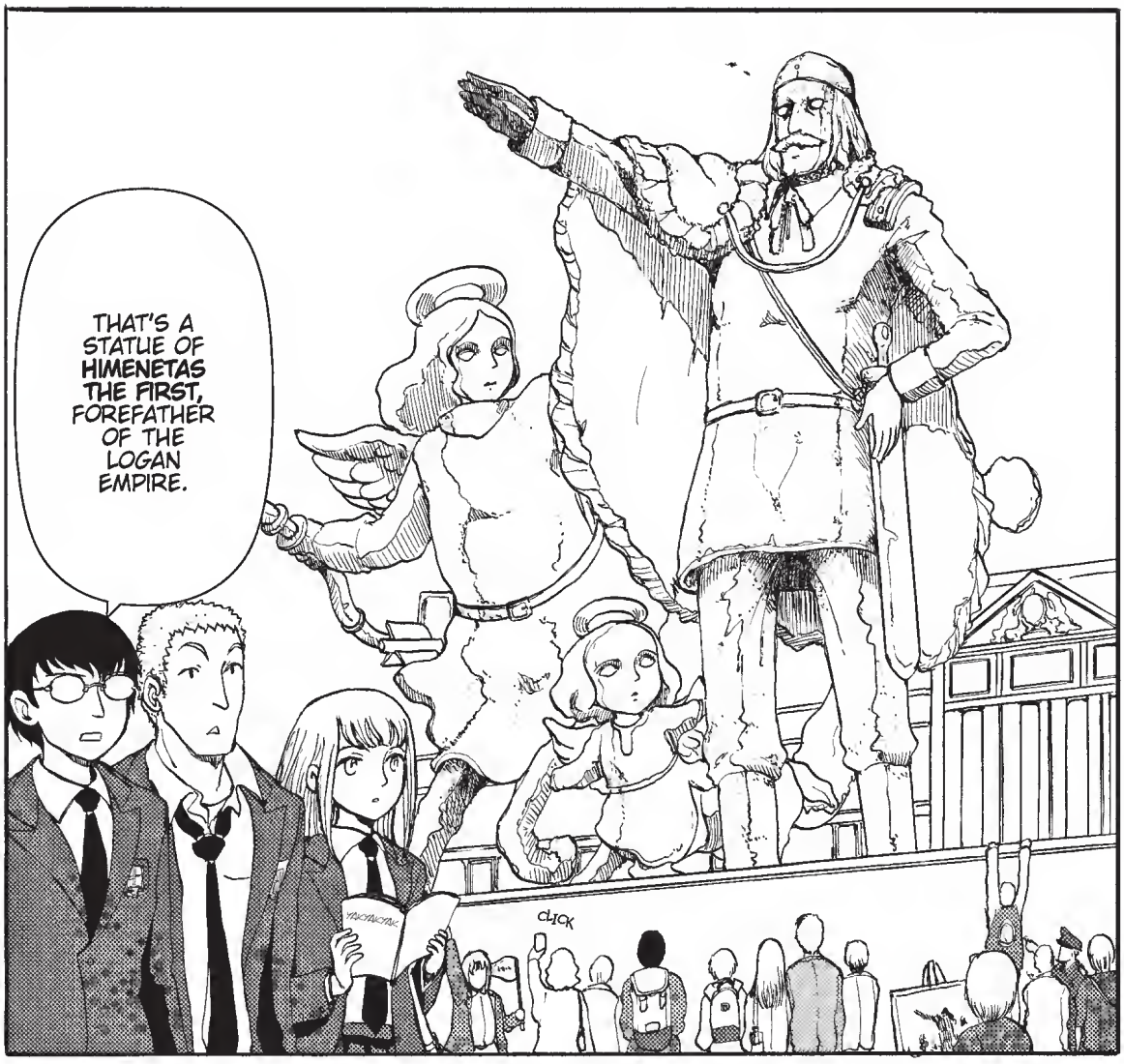

CRACK
WHAM
WHOA!

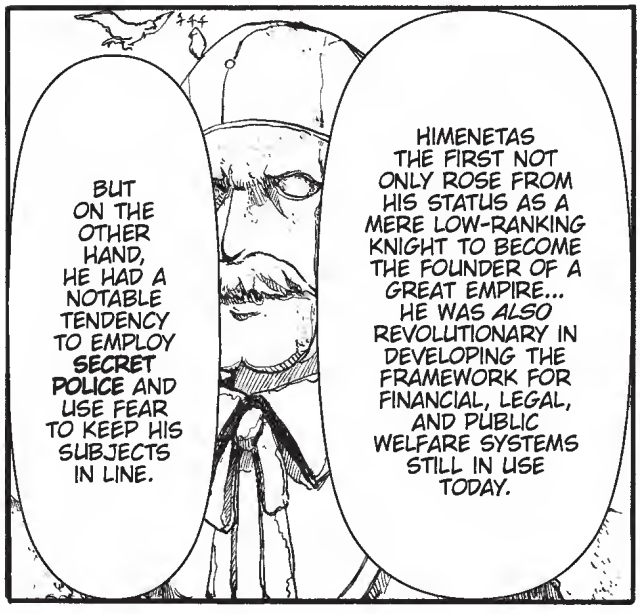

Nag Nag Nag
MEH, ARM STRENGTH IS A HOLLOW PURSUIT.
TO-TALLY.
It's the spark of intellect that's most important to a man.
And yet, I'm jealous.


CRAP, IT'S THE PREZ!
YOU ALL RIGHT?!

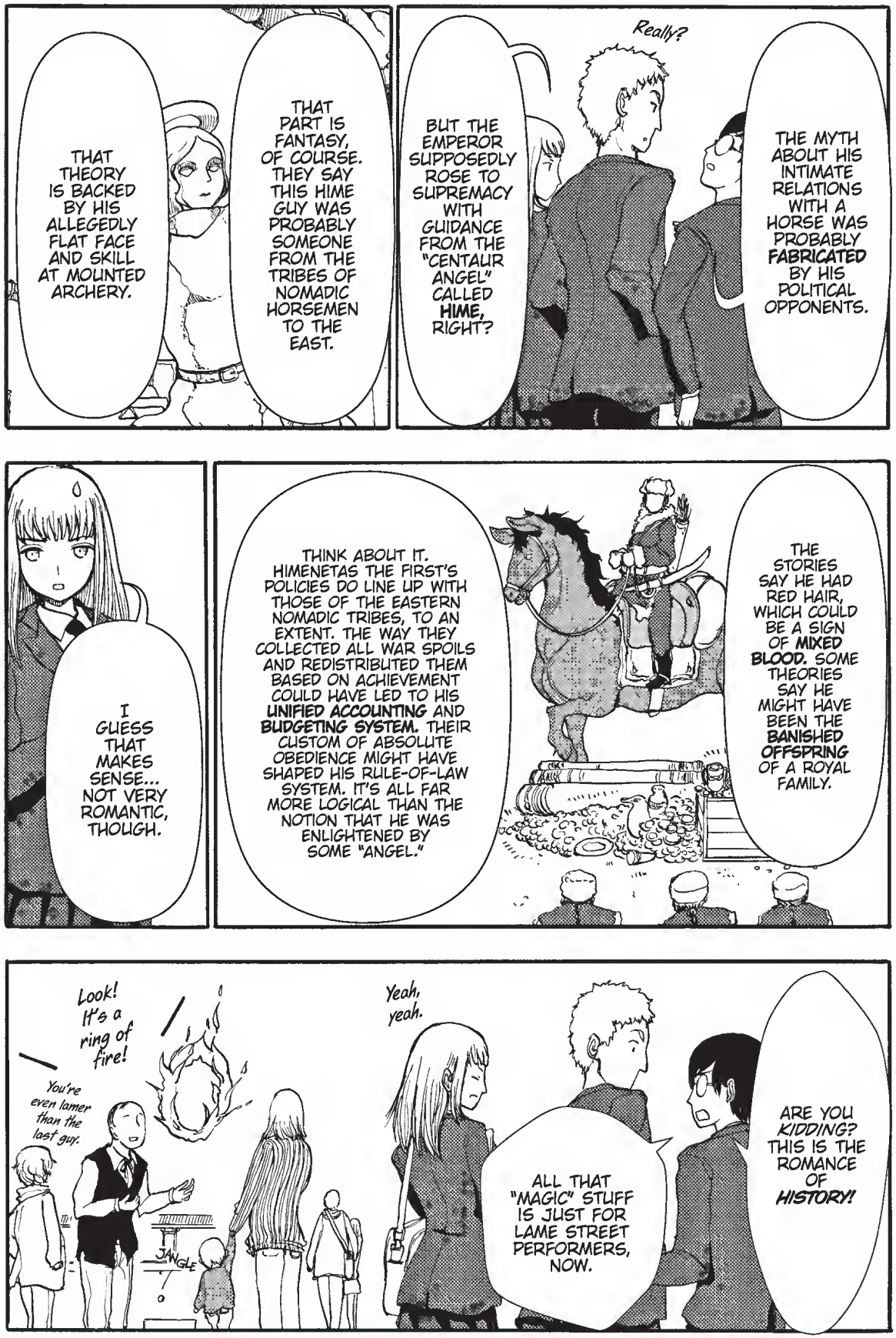

YOU BOYS BROKE ANOTHER ONE?!

A CentaUr's Life


THAT'S A STATUE OF HIMENETAS THE FIRST, FOREFATHER OF THE LOGAN EMPIRE.
CLICK


HIMENETAS THE FIRST NOT ONLY ROSE FROM HIS STATUS AS A MERE LOW-RANKING KNIGHT TO BECOME THE FOUNDER OF A GREAT EMPIRE... HE WAS *ALSO* REVOLUTIONARY IN DEVELOPING THE FRAMEWORK FOR FINANCIAL, LEGAL, AND PUBLIC WELFARE SYSTEMS STILL IN USE TODAY.
BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, HE HAD A NOTABLE TENDENCY TO EMPLOY **SECRET POLICE** AND USE FEAR TO KEEP HIS SUBJECTS IN LINE.

AH YEAH, I KNOW 'IM. THAT CRAZY OLD DUDE WHO TRIED TO DO IT WITH A HORSE AND CREATE A CENTAUR, RIGHT?
PSH, THAT'S JUST A **MYTH.**


THAT THEORY IS BACKED BY HIS ALLEGEDLY FLAT FACE AND SKILL AT MOUNTED ARCHERY.
THAT PART IS FANTASY, OF COURSE. THEY SAY THIS HIME GUY WAS PROBABLY SOMEONE FROM THE TRIBES OF NOMADIC HORSEMEN TO THE EAST.
BUT THE EMPEROR SUPPOSEDLY ROSE TO SUPREMACY WITH GUIDANCE FROM THE "CENTAUR ANGEL" CALLED **HIME,** RIGHT?
Really?
THE MYTH ABOUT HIS INTIMATE RELATIONS WITH A HORSE WAS PROBABLY **FABRICATED** BY HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS.
I GUESS THAT MAKES SENSE... NOT VERY ROMANTIC, THOUGH.
THINK ABOUT IT. HIMENETAS THE FIRST'S POLICIES DO LINE UP WITH THOSE OF THE EASTERN NOMADIC TRIBES, TO AN EXTENT. THE WAY THEY COLLECTED ALL WAR SPOILS AND REDISTRIBUTED THEM BASED ON ACHIEVEMENT COULD HAVE LED TO HIS **UNIFIED ACCOUNTING** AND **BUDGETING SYSTEM.** THEIR CUSTOM OF ABSOLUTE OBEDIENCE MIGHT HAVE SHAPED HIS RULE-OF-LAW SYSTEM. IT'S ALL FAR MORE LOGICAL THAN THE NOTION THAT HE WAS ENLIGHTENED BY SOME "ANGEL."
THE STORIES SAY HE HAD RED HAIR, WHICH COULD BE A SIGN OF **MIXED BLOOD.** SOME THEORIES SAY HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE **BANISHED OFFSPRING** OF A ROYAL FAMILY.
Look! It's a ring of fire!
You're even lamer than the last guy.
JANGLE
Yeah, yeah.
ALL THAT "MAGIC" STUFF IS JUST FOR LAME STREET PERFORMERS, NOW.
ARE YOU *KIDDING?* THIS IS THE ROMANCE OF ***HISTORY!***

GROWTH AS A FARMING REGION

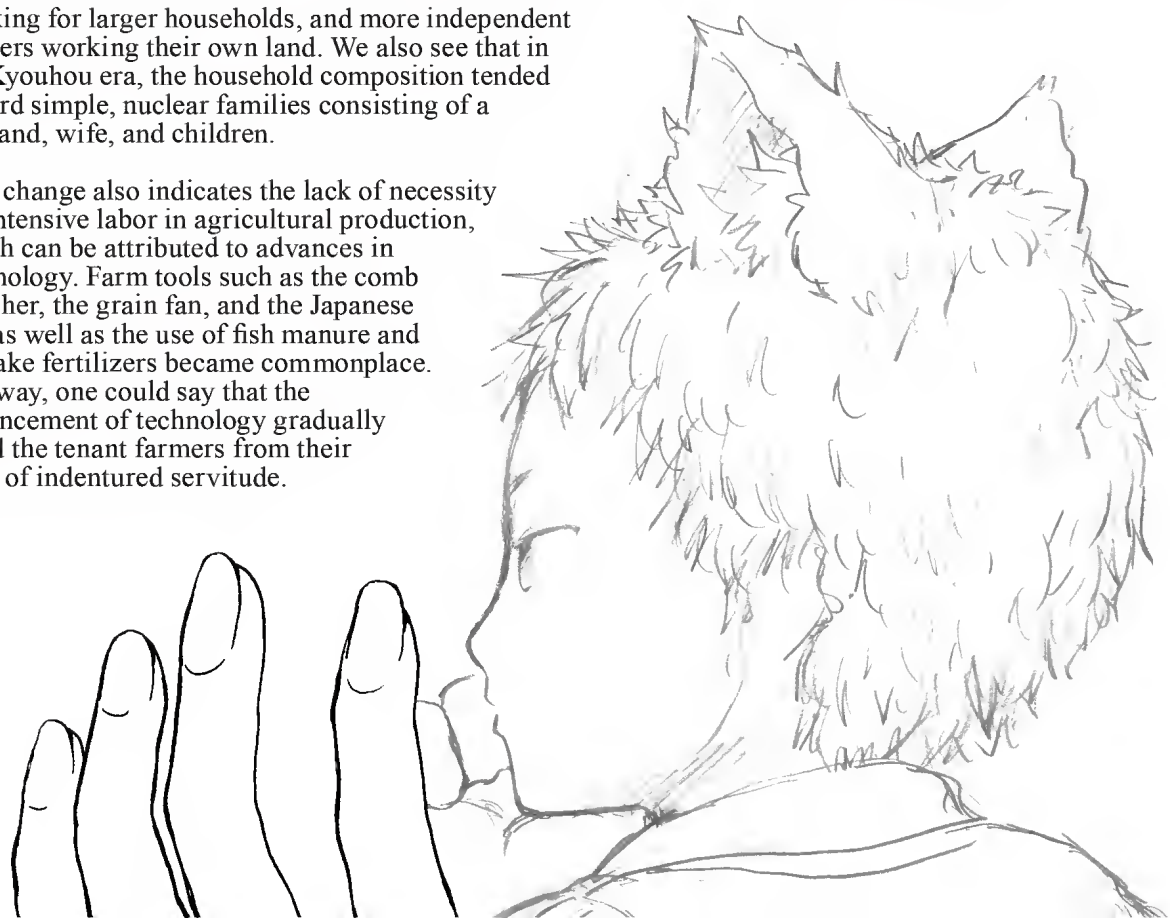
What type of society springs to mind when young readers think of the Edo period? Is it the glamorous, urban society depicted in TV period dramas? Or instead the harsh world depicted in old comics, where peasants are worked to death by the dominating class of landowners and samurai, unable to even live off the crop they generate themselves?

Previously, we discussed how the Kanata region was divided into a number of smaller splinters, including a Bakufu domain, retainer domains, religious domains, and various other satellite domains. Consequently, there was no population center one could call a "city," and until its establishment as an academic town in the modern age, Kanata continued to exist as a rural, agricultural region.

So then, what was it actually like? Many clues can be gleaned from the land census, or *kenchi-chou.* This census sought to evaluate the population and means of crop production in order to determine appropriate tax rates. It was carried out in the Bakufu domain in 1640 (Kan'ei 7), and in the Tsuchiura domain in 1634. This led to the firm definition of village borders and organization. Observing the state of Akanuma village, we see that initially, 41% of the population owned more than 15 *tan* (roughly 3.5 acres) of land. Of the village's 42 households, each held an average of ten individuals, with some holding as many as twenty-eight. The reason for this is not only that families had many children or that homes held three generations in those times, but also that any tenant farmers were counted as members of the household. Taxes, forced labor, and other levies only applied to those farmers who owned their own land (independent farmers), who were in turn considered official citizens of the village.

At the beginning of this historical period, the land census shows us that agriculture was mostly controlled by a smaller number of landowners who employed many tenant farmers to work the land. This trend, however, would prove to change over time. The number of households increased to 52 by 1701 (Genroku 14), and to 65 in 1717 (Kyouhou 2), while in contrast, the average number of individuals per household dropped to six... almost half of what it had been decades before. This data tells us that there were fewer tenant farmers working for larger households, and more independent farmers working their own land. We also see that in the Kyouhou era, the household composition tended toward simple, nuclear families consisting of a husband, wife, and children.

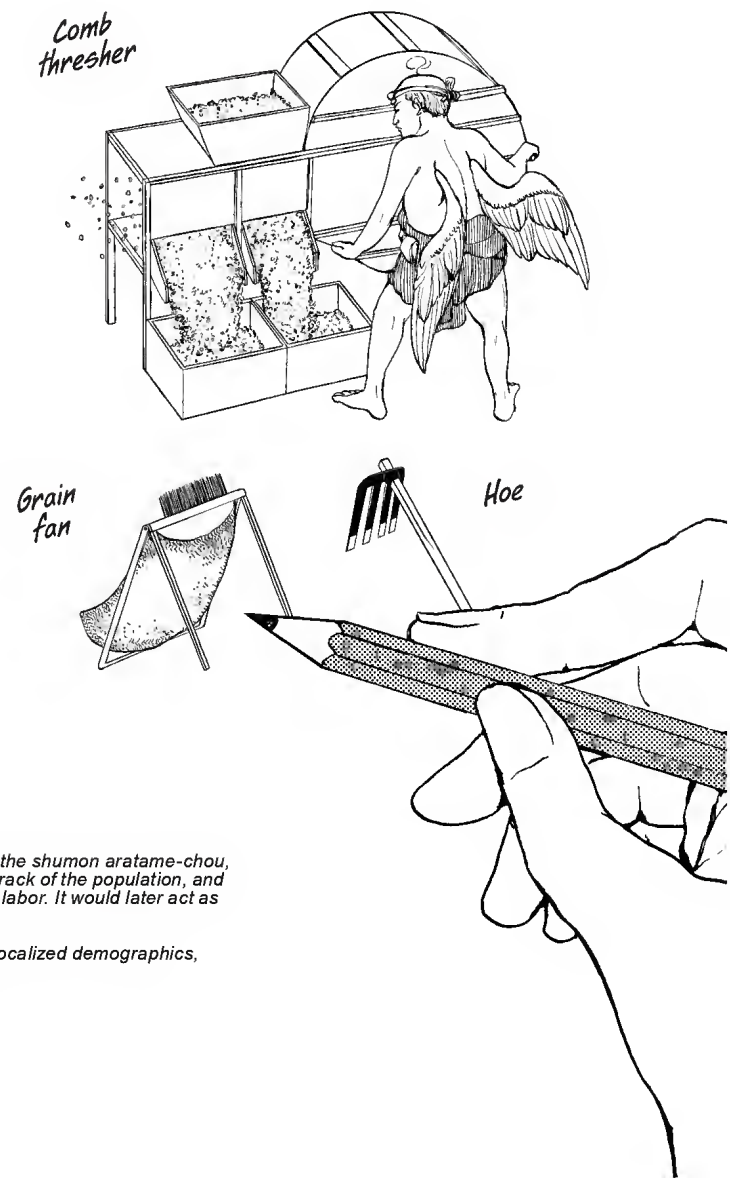
This change also indicates the lack of necessity for intensive labor in agricultural production, which can be attributed to advances in technology. Farm tools such as the comb thresher, the grain fan, and the Japanese hoe as well as the use of fish manure and oil cake fertilizers became commonplace. In a way, one could say that the advancement of technology gradually freed the tenant farmers from their lives of indentured servitude.



The imposition of crushing, oppressive taxes was also becoming a thing of the past. Such cruel governance is enabled by the monopolization of means of production.

What we do *not* know from the *kenchi-chou* (land census) or the *shumon-ninbetsu aratame-chou** is the demographic breakdown of the population by race**. As the controlling samurai class was not racially exclusive, a hierarchical ideology towards race never emerged in Japan. Hence, as long as taxes were being paid, there was no reason for collectors to inquire about race, let alone write it down in a registry. Centaurs and Merfolk, who did not take part in rice production, were different. While the Merfolk fell under the control of a separate coastal magistrate, the Centaurs who occupied these villages were physically incapable of working the rice paddies. As a result, their taxes were paid by way of compulsory labor, or else via cash payments from money earned through mercantile activity. This still doesn't give us an accurate count, however, because Centaurs were still not tracked in any registry and even their taxes paid in cash were first converted into rice before being recorded. The domains and Bakufu collecting the taxes would ultimately sell the rice in exchange for cash anyway, meaning this process was doubly redundant, but this manner of control was necessary in order to maintain a fair system.

Domains essentially operated as independent countries, but were answerable to a powerful overarching Bakufu. It was not possible to invade adjacent domains and expand one's influence as it had been in the *Sengoku* period. Moreover, any domain in which revolts occurred could be deemed unfit to govern by the Bakufu and subsequently dissolved. As a result, it became vital for domains to maintain a fair system for taxation. Converting rice into cash (and vice-versa) created a necessity for mathematics, accounting, and a means of correspondence to keep track of market rice values, as well as an understanding of physiology in order to estimate labor and consumption, and these necessities spurred advancements as well. In other words, history gives us clear proof that efforts to create racial equality naturally gave way to a just political system, more comfortable lifestyles, and the advancement of education.



**The shumon-ninbetsu aratame-chou was a registry which combined the shumon aratame-chou, a registry used by Buddhist temples under the danka system to keep track of the population, and the ninbetsu aratame-chou, a registry which kept track of compulsory labor. It would later act as the basis for the modern Japanese census.*

***Only in the case of Centaurs and Merfolk can we indirectly deduce localized demographics, by referring to the kenchi-chou and the topography of the land itself.*

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story and art by **KEI MURAYAMA**

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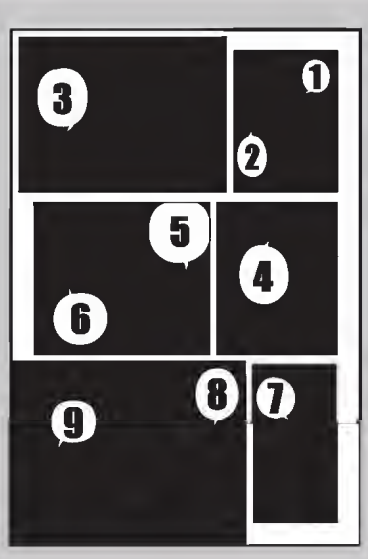
This book reads from ***right to left***, Japanese style. If this is your first time reading manga, you start reading from the top right panel on each page and take it from there. If you get lost, just follow the numbered diagram here. It may seem backwards at first, but you'll get the hang of it! Have fun!!



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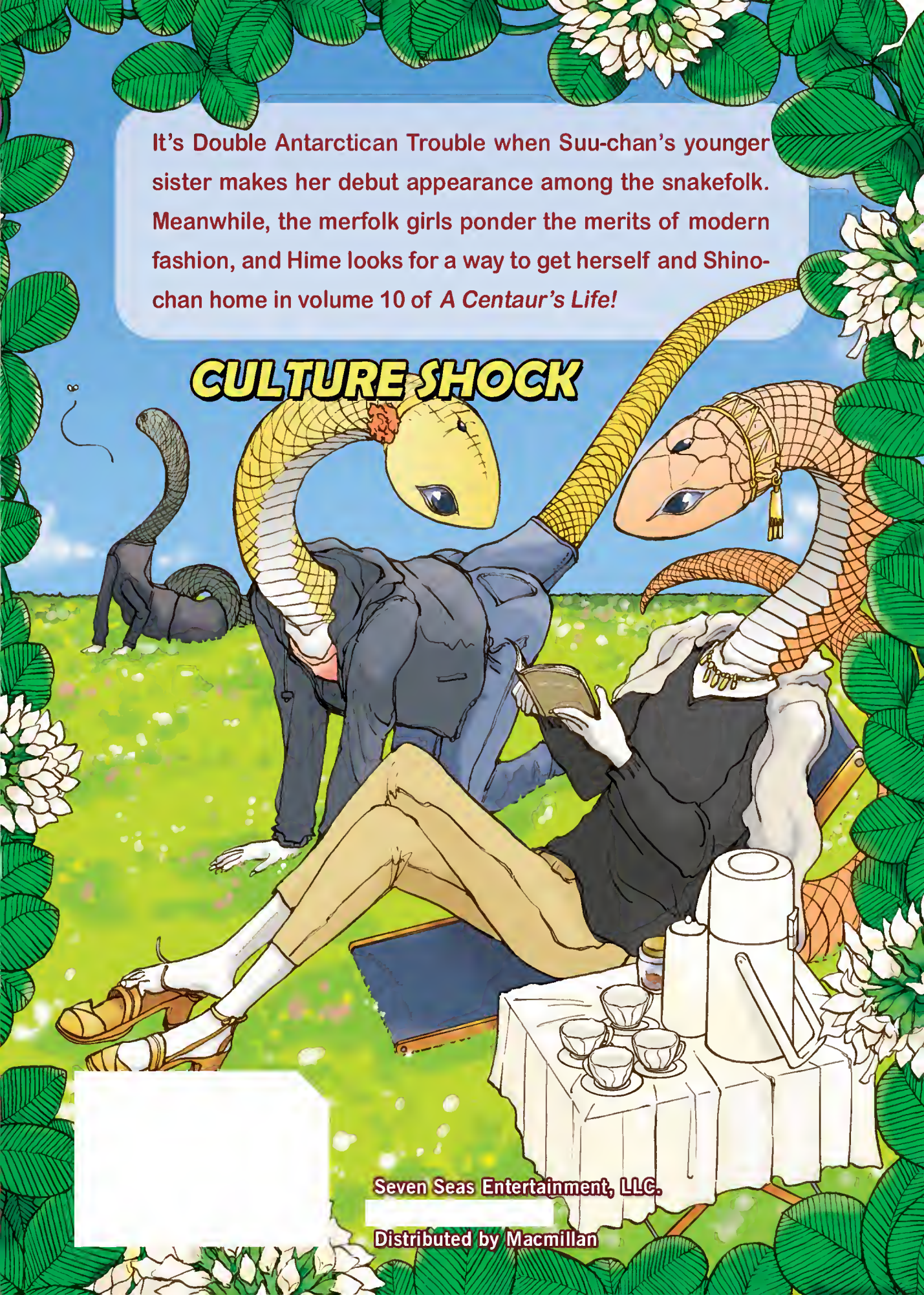

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